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AUSTRALIA UNITED
Fans are encouraged to get behind Australia's World Cup bid.

Have you joined the bid?

Show your support for Australia's campaign to bring the greatest show on earth, the FIFA World Cup, to Australia in 2018 or 2022, by joining the bid.

It is a hotly contested race with Australia pitching its wares against the likes of England, Portugal/Spain, Russia, and the USA – to name just a few.

Showing your support couldn't be easier. All you need to do is log on to *australia2018-2022.com.au* and follow the prompts. Then tell your friends, work mates and family (and then make sure they tell their friends, workmates and family too).

The World Cup is the largest single sporting event in the world – it's bigger than the Olympic Games. 26.3 billion people tuned in to watch the 2006 World Cup around the world on a cumulative basis – the largest television viewing came from the Asian region (about 35 per cent of the cumulative television audience).

The first World Cup was hosted, and won, by Uruguay in 1930. In all, the tournament has been held 18 times. European countries have staged the World Cup 10 times, while it has been held in South America on four occasions.

Mexico has hosted it twice, in 1970 and 1986, the USA once (in 1994) and, in 2002, the World Cup was played on Asian shores for the first time, when South Korea and Japan were co-hosts.

In 2010, the World Cup will make its African debut, in South Africa, while four years later, it will return to Brazil, for the first time since 1950.

The World Cup has never been held in Australia, which makes it all the more important for you to get behind our bid. Every registration helps us show FIFA how passionate all of Australia is about hosting a World Cup. Join today!

Did you know?

There are eight bidders for the 2018 World Cup. They are: Australia, Belgium/Netherlands, England, Indonesia, Japan, Portugal/Spain, Russia and the USA. Mexico withdrew its bid last month, citing financial concerns. For the 2022 World Cup, the same eight countries and co-hosts are bidding. They are joined by Qatar and the Korea Republic, bringing the total bidders to 10.

COME PLAY!

ONE ON ONE

SHARP SHOOTER Striker Scott McDonald is desperate to break his scoring drought for his country.

Scott McDonald opens up on Celtic, scoring goals and stirring his teammates.

You must be looking forward to playing in front of your home crowd in Melbourne against Oman.
I always look forward to playing in front of the crowd in Melbourne. It's a great feeling. We definitely need the points. It's strange – you go from one day doing so well in qualifying for the World Cup, then all the focus switches to the Asian Cup qualifying. We don't want to miss out and we need to get three points on the board.

It would be a great place to break your international scoring duck.
That would be great. The issue is now creeping up and it's still not happened. I've just got to keep trying and working hard.

Do you prefer playing as a lone striker or in a partnership, for example with Josh Kennedy?
I've done both now for the team. Ultimately, I just want to be playing. The coach has got a few different formations, and they've been quite successful so far, and I'm more than willing to fit in with his plans.

The Netherlands will present a big challenge in Sydney.
It's a good test for us. We played Holland last year and did quite well, getting a result over there. Obviously, they are a very good technical side. It will be a good test leading into the World Cup, and a chance for the likes of myself and other players to show we deserve a spot in the squad.

We'll see where we are as a team.

On the domestic front, is the main focus at Celtic this season to reclaim the title from Rangers?
One hundred per cent. It's certainly our focus this year after coming so close last year. I've now had the highs and lows of winning and losing the title, and I know which one I prefer. It's gone down to the wire the last two seasons, and hopefully it doesn't go to the last game this time – my heart can't take much more of that. Also, playing in Europe has been a major target. We're in the Europa League and want to qualify for the next stage.

Will you be at Celtic for the foreseeable future?
There have been a few rumours, but I'm very happy where I am. I want to bring success to myself and to the club, and to keep on scoring goals.

Have you given any stick to your Celtic teammates who have missed out on the World Cup?
Only a little tiny bit – I did promise a few I'd send some postcards from South Africa. To be honest, I felt sorry for those who missed out. There were a lot of sad faces around here last month, and I'd love as many of the squad to go to South Africa as possible. It's a great chance to develop as a player.

ComePlay

ON THE ONLINE STORE

Check out the online store for great new products. Now available are 'ComePlay!' pens and notepads – a new range from BIC. The notepad is made from 88 per cent post-consumer recycled fibre. The pens are produced using plastic from a renewable resource. Also in stock are BBQ aprons – perfect for summer barbies. See the latest gear at *australia2018-2022.com.au/store.aspx*

CHAMPIONS Yallorin of the North, winner of the inaugural Indigenous Football Festival.

Finding new talent

The FFA'sIndigenous Football Development Program (IFDP is a 10-year national plan to increase the number wof Indigenous people playing football.

FFA CEO Ben Buckley is hoping to unearth Indigenous players who can compete at the top level.

"We believe we have a responsibility to encourage more young people of Indigenous background to play football as a way to improve their life through better health, better education and improved skills," he said.

"Indigenous players from other sports show that success in sport has a very positive effect on the local community and we want football to have the same impact.

"Of course, we also hope that we will find more talented young players who can go on to play at the highest level, such as the Qantas Socceroos and Westfield Matildas, as well as the Hyundai A-League, the Westfield W-League and our other competitions."

The 10-year aim of the program is to have at least five per cent of players in all national teams and major competitions of Indigenous background.

Tune in

Outback United, a documentary on the Indigenous Football Development Program, will air on SBS Two on Sunday, October 18 at 8.30pm, and on SBS One on Sunday, November 8 at noon.

Capturing the history of Indigenous football in Australia, as well as highlights from the recent inaugural Indigenous Football Festival, it is a documentary not to be missed.

Tune in to see interviews with Qantas Socceroo Jade North, Adelaide United captain Travis Dodd, Olympian Cathy Freeman, AFL star Adam Goodes and much more.

Your chance to meet Tim Cahill

Donate $20 to UNICEF and you could win a trip to England to watch Tim Cahill play for Everton.

If you would like to meet Qantas Socceroo star and watch him play in the Everton v Manchester United match at Goodison Park on February 20, 2010, simply make a minimum $20 online donation to UNICEF's West Africa appeal between now and January 15, 2010, and describe why Cahill is one of your favourite Qantas Socceroos.

The best entrant will win return economy flights for two people (from your nearest international airport) with Qantas, five nights' twin-share accommodation, tickets and transfers to the game.
See terms and conditions at *unicef.org.au*.

HERO See Tim Cahill in action.

To enter, simply visit the competition page at *unicef.org.au*.

UNICEF is the United Nations Children's Fund and relies entirely on voluntary donations and support from partners.

unicef

Showing support at UNICEF

The Hyundai A-League and Westfield W-League clubs will show their support for UNICEF during the October round 12 and round four matches respectively. This weekend has been chosen to celebrate Universal Children's Day on October 28.

The UNICEF rounds form part of the ongoing *Level the Playing Field* partnership between FFA and UNICEF Australia. Various initiatives will take place during the week to help raise awareness for UNICEF's work.

One player from each Hyundai A-League and Westfield W-League team has been chosen to become a UNICEF ambassador. These new UNICEF ambassadors have been working to support UNICEF and help the world's most vulnerable children. All players are showing their support this weekend by wearing blue armbands during the UNICEF matches.

UNICEF Australia Chief Executive, Carolyn Hardy, thanked the players for their support.

"We're delighted FFA is helping to raise much-needed awareness and funds for children and celebrate Universal Children's Day in such a fitting way – through the world game of football.

"This is an opportunity for players and spectators to help UNICEF provide significant and lasting care to the world's vulnerable children."

Funds raised through UNICEF Australia's partnership with FFA this season will be used to support healthy living for children in West Africa.

Football with style

The Westfield W-League gives talented, elite female players the opportunity to play in a high-quality national competition.

Now in its second season, the Westfield W-League season kicked off on Saturday, October 3. Competing teams in the 2009 season are Brisbane Roar, Canberra United, Central Coast Mariners, Melbourne Victory, Newcastle Jets, Perth, Adelaide and Sydney FC.

FFA's Head of Women's Football, Leeanne Grantham, said the women's game has enjoyed a rapid rise in popularity.

"Women's football has been the fastest-growing team sport for girls for more than five years and is enjoyed by more than 100,000 women and girls in registered competition," Grantham said.

You can catch all the Westfield W-League action live and exclusive on ABC, on Saturdays at 3pm. For the latest fixtures and information, visit *w-league.com.au*.

Proud Patron

Women's football recently announced a new champion with Her Excellency the Governor-General, Ms Quentin Bryce AC, signing on as the Patron of Women's Football.

Your ticket to the World Cup

WHiRL (noun, verb): the spinning action (movement) above one's head to demonstrate their love for Hyundai A-League football.

Hyundai's 'I Love Football' competition for the Hyundai A-League season 2009-10 is encouraging fans to 'Give it a WHiRL' for a chance to take off to the 2010 World Cup. Fans are being asked to submit a photo or video of them WHiRLING to be eligible for the following great prizes:

Monthly major winners will receive a return trip and accommodation to the 2010 A-League Grand Final. Winners will be selected by a panel based on creativity, originality and passion. Monthly minor winners will receive an autographed A-League playing shirt. Winners will be randomly selected from all submissions on the website every month.

One major prize winner will receive a trip for two to the 2010 World Cup. This prize will be determined by votes cast for the six monthly winners during the finals series, with the winner to be announced at half-time of the 2010 A-League Grand Final.

'Give it a WHiRL' for a chance to win these sensational prizes, courtesy of Hyundai, simply by submitting your entry to *ilovefootball.com.au*.

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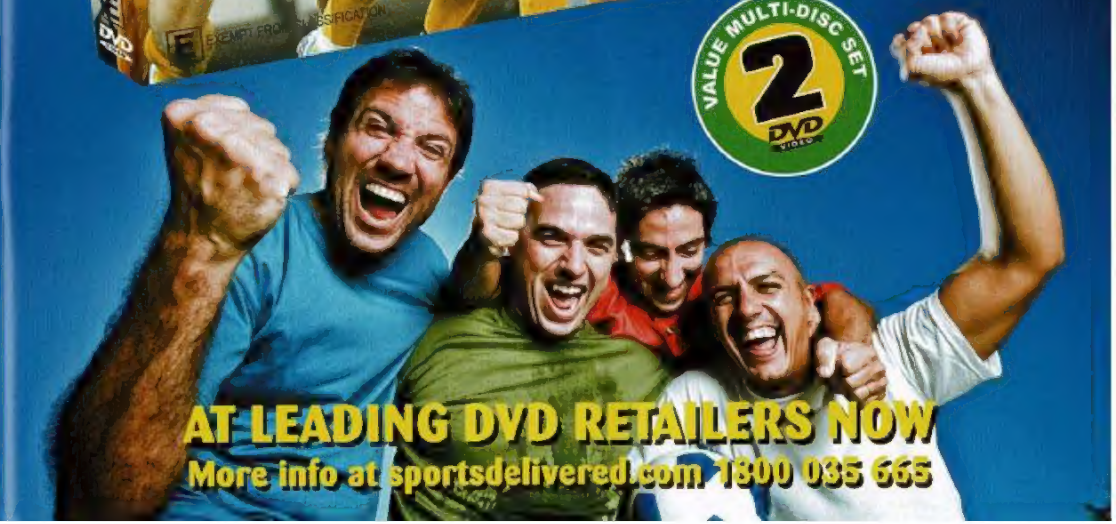
QANTAS SOCCEROOS THEIR JOURNEY TO 2010:

The mini-series that follows the Socceroos on their road to the 2010 World Cup; all the qualifying action as Pim Verbeek's squad fought for that vital qualification to the Finals in South Africa in this 2-disc set.

Also included is a second bonus disc featuring the Qantas Socceroos v Japan game in its entirety and all the Qantas Socceroos big names, including Harry Kewell, as well as Tim Cahill and Lucas Neill.



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STRIKING GOLD

In the biggest coup in the A-League's short history, Australian star Jason Culina turned his back on Europe and joined new club Gold Coast United for the 2009-10 season. Back home and at the peak of powers, he is adamant his game will get even better.

BY MICHAEL LYNCH

Jason Culina has only been back in his native Australia for a few months, but he has already heard enough from the doubters to last him a lifetime.

He shouldn't have come back just yet, the critics said. It's far too early in his career.

The 29-year-old, a regular at the last World Cup and a man with more than 20 European Champions League matches to his credit, was surely jeopardising not just his prospects for the 2010 World Cup, but the Qantas Socceroos to boot. He turned his back on the high-profile European game and a new contract offer from Dutch giant PSV Eindhoven in favour of a return to his home country to play for A-League newcomer Gold Coast United.

How could he be prepared to man the trenches in the engine room of the Socceroo midfield in the white-hot environment of a World Cup group match if he hadn't prepared by playing in a high-quality European league, the sceptics asked.

Of course, those same naysayers rarely level the same critique at Craig Moore, the Brisbane Roar central defender and former Socceroo skipper, who is expected to form the lynchpin of the Australian backline in South Africa on exactly the same preparation. But then when was criticism ever measured – or often rational.

Justified or not, Culina has heard it all – and is ignoring it.

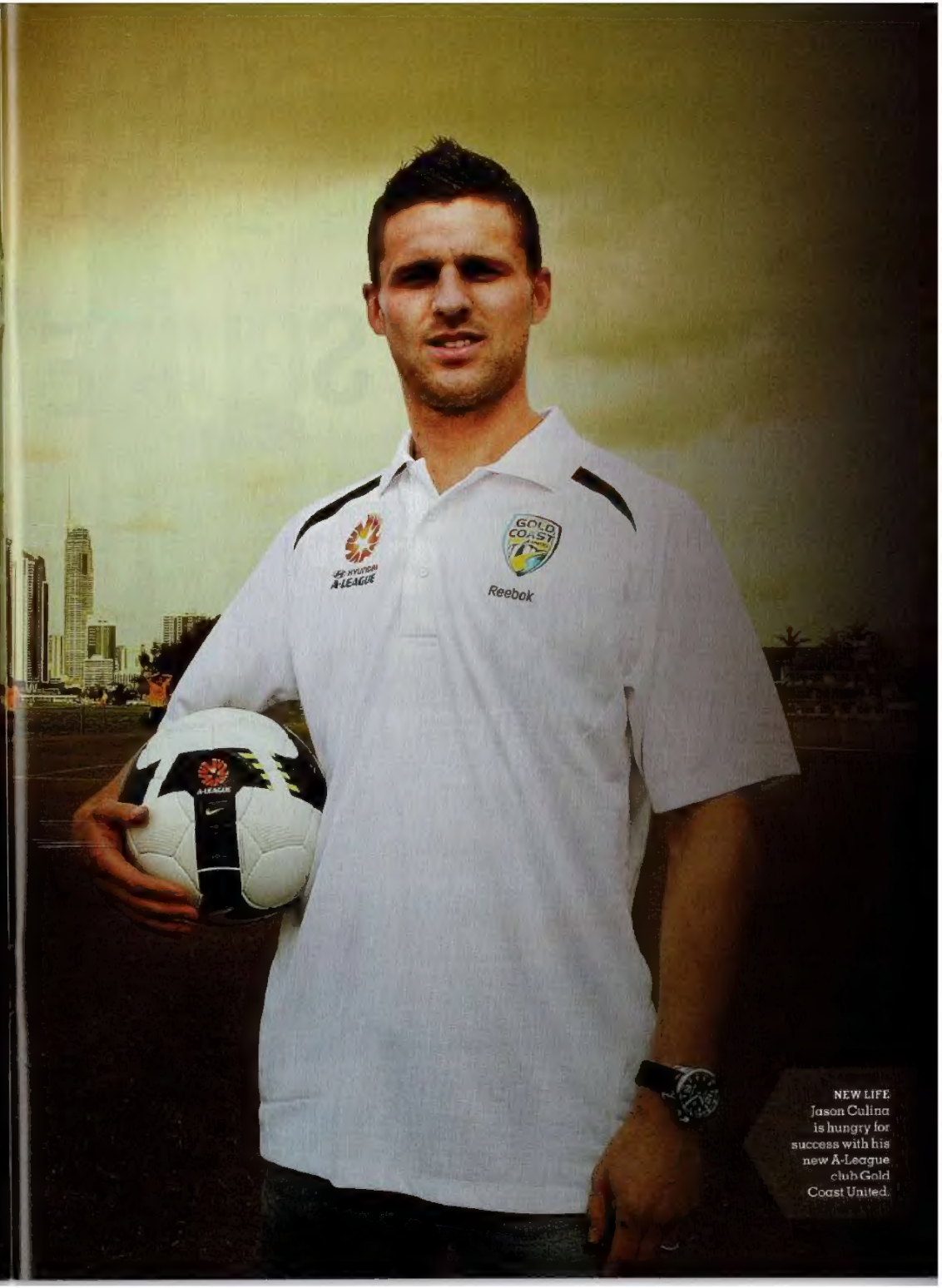
Rather than worrying about those who question his wisdom or ambition because of his decision to leave the European stage at the peak of his playing powers, as he helps to build and develop the sport in the country of his birth, Culina believes the sceptics have missed the point.

He is, he says, only enhancing his skill set and developing himself as a player by plying his trade in the elite domestic competition.

The eloquent Culina, a man who can marshall an argument as well as he strokes a through ball down the attacking channel for prolific goalscoring teammate Shane Smeltz, insists that he is broadening, not narrowing, his game with the Gold Coast. Coach Miron Bleiberg is allowing him to give more expression to his natural attacking talents – talents regularly demonstrated in his teenage days when he began to make his name as a skilful and creative youngster in the old NSL.

But when former Socceroo boss Guus Hiddink brought him to Eindhoven after spells at Ajax and FC Twente in the Netherlands, and transformed him into a hard-working holding midfielder – a "screener" or "controller" as the Dutch prefer to call them – Culina's attacking days seemed to become a thing of the past. He played the new role with distinction for both PSV and Australia.

Yet those attacking instincts have never deserted him. While Australia's coach Pim Verbeek will almost certainly ask him to play his usual role against the Netherlands and Oman, Culina can be relied upon to take any chances he gets in or around the penalty box with aplomb – if the pattern of the games allows him to get forward.



NEW LIFE Jason Culina is hungry for success with his new A-League club Gold Coast United.

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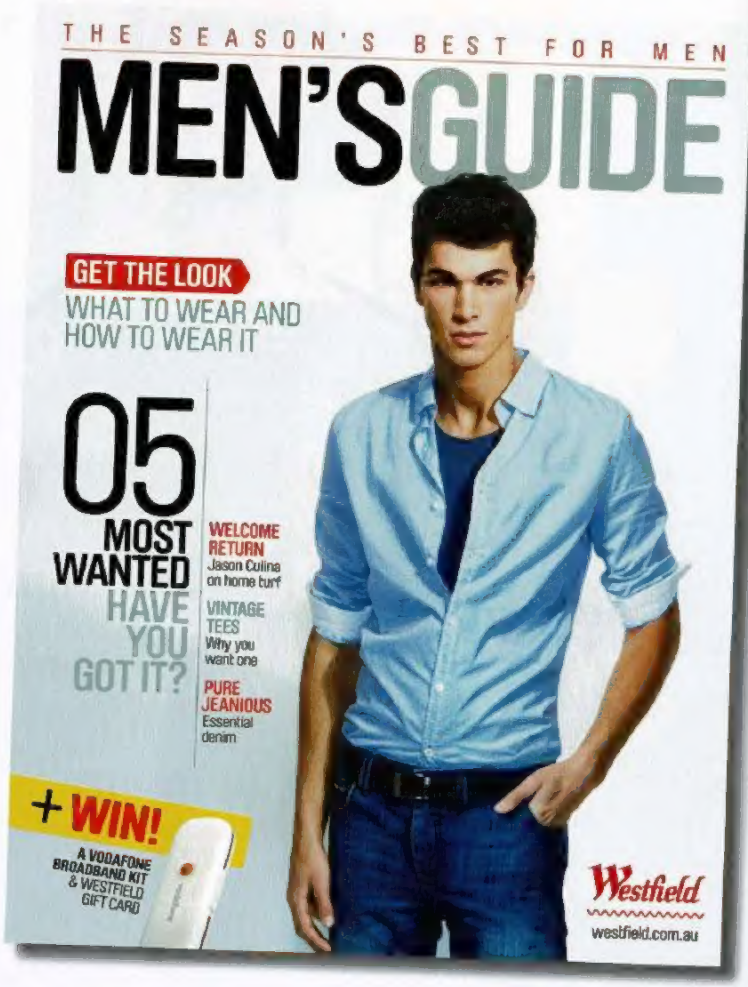

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WORLD FIRST
Celebrating with Harry Kewell (far left) and Tim Cahill in the 2006 World Cup against Croatia.

"It was what the team needed at the time and Guus saw something different in me," he says, recalling his changed role. "I really enjoyed playing in that position. It was great. But naturally I am more of an attacking player. I love going forward, I love supporting the two front men. It is frustrating at times not to be able to play yourself in your natural position, but you do the job that the coach wants you to do."

Those who decry the standard of the A-League are way off target, insists Culina, who is the first national team regular to transfer back home at the high point of his career. Australian footballers are generally not rated as well as they should be, Culina suggests, and that applies to the A-League as a whole. In contrast, he argues, several overseas leagues are given a higher billing than they should get because of the excellence of a handful of their leading teams.

I think I am still the fittest and sharpest guy in the national team and I have not dropped my game at all. I have too much pride in my game and in myself to do that.

"I have always been bullish about the A-League in general. I think it's growing and getting better and that Australian players in general are underestimated. I do believe honestly that we are at a very high level here and we just don't get the opportunity to show it," he says.

"A lot of people, when they watch the English Premier League on television and watch the likes of Manchester United and Manchester City and Chelsea and Arsenal, imagine the rest of the English league is watching those four or five teams. And it's not. I can tell you that it's not.

"It was also like that in Holland. We had some horrible games, and some very average teams playing there. It's the same in England – it's no different. If you take away the top few teams, you look at the rest, they are not all that high a standard.

"We have been underestimated for a long period of time, and it's time to change that. We do have some very good players here capable of playing at a high level and a lot of people will be able to see that shortly."

Surely, though, Culina must have had some doubts about the wisdom of coming home now rather than waiting until the 2010-2011 season? Especially after Verbeek had made his widely reported comment that the intensity of training and playing at a big European club – even in the reserve team – might be greater than playing first team football in Australia.

"Not at all," Culina shoots back. "I think I am still the fittest and sharpest guy in the national team and I have not dropped my game at all.

"I have too much pride in my game and in myself to do that. I want to prove to myself that coming back here is not a drop in any level and I feel that I am becoming a better player now because I am expressing myself more and enjoying myself more. Anyone who thinks my level has dropped or will drop has got to be kidding. I will never let it happen.

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"I drive myself hard. I know that my football career is not a long one so, in the short time that I have to play football, I want to do my best. I want to show everybody just how good I am. I have probably only got another five or six years left in me, so I want to give it my all and I want to show just how good I am and that I deserve to be where I am and achieve what I have."

Culina will, if the Australian game develops the way it should, occupy a pivotal position in its emerging history because of the stage in his career that he has come back. Several decorated Socceroos – Moore, Melbourne Victory captain Kevin Muscat and Brisbane midfielder Danny Tiatto to name but three – have also returned, but all were in their 30s when their days at the highest level in Europe were behind them.

Culina is the poster boy of the A-League, but he is not at all perturbed by the weight of expectation that rests upon his shoulders.

"It wasn't that hard a decision. I had 10 years in Europe and I came back here basically for a new challenge. I had achieved what I wanted to in Europe and I wanted to do something different," he says. "I enjoyed myself immensely while I was over there and had some great challenges, but I just thought it was time for a bit of a change. I had been in Holland for 10 years and felt that a new atmosphere and a new bunch of crowds would freshen things up, so here I am.

GREEN AND BOLD
Culina believes Australia can improve on its 2006 World Cup showing.

"I think it was the right decision. Players are always looking to go to the right club for all of the right reasons. I was involved in a very successful team in Holland, winning championships, and playing in the Champions League.

"I didn't want to go somewhere where I wouldn't be playing for championships, I knew that coming back here to the Gold Coast, after speaking to Miron and (owner) Clive Palmer, I knew they had the ambition to create a successful team and club here.

"I wanted to be part of something that was going to be successful, and so far it's gone well and I haven't regretted my decision one bit. I did also have the opportunity to stay at PSV. I was offered a new deal there, so I could have remained in Europe, but I decided to come back here for the new challenge."

Most Australians follow the English Premier League, and most of the top Australian players have played (or still do) in the best-known league in the world. Culina didn't and, as his view expressed on the standard of the top English division might suggest, he isn't losing any sleep over it.

"It's not at all an unfulfilled ambition, not in any way. I never had any real ambition to play there. I always wanted

Football matters

Jason Culina shares his thoughts on his father Branko, the World Cup in South Africa and the 'Oranjification' of the game in Australia.

On his father Branko, coach of the Newcastle Jets and one of Australian football's most respected figures:

"His influence was enormous. Without him I wouldn't be playing football, that's for sure. What he's done in the past, all the coaching, all the time he's put into taking me to training, showing me certain things, encouraging me all the time. If it wasn't for my father and my mother (Nada), I wouldn't be where I am. He's been unbelievable. Dad's done a great job, and it's great to see him back in the A-League."

On the Dutch influence in the local game, with coach Pim Verbeek, assistant Henk Duut and technical director Han Berger:

"It's a fantastic thing for the game. Holland is one of the best footballing countries in the world, and they produce so many good players. Why not bring them along and teach us how to play the game? With the successes we have had with players in Europe, and in the World Cup with Guus Hiddink and then Pim Verbeek, why not bring more in and show us how to play the game?"

On Mile Sterjovski, friend and former teammate who has also returned to the A-League:

"He definitely won't harm his World Cup prospects by being in the A-League. He's too professional and is like me – he has too much pride to not want to do his best. He wants to go to another World Cup. I have known Mile for many, many years. We played together at Sydney United, so I go back a long time with him and he has the same attitudes as I have."

On his move home to Gold Coast United:

"We are a new team, but I don't believe we have to take our time. We have to go full throttle this year and try to gain as much as we can. In the long run, it will benefit not only the club, but the city itself. PSV had a lot of history and tradition. We don't, but we want to be successful straightaway. All good teams should want to be successful."

On World Cup 2006 and the Qantas Socceroos' hopes for 2010:

"I feel absolutely rapt that I was involved in the World Cup, but I want to do better this time around. We were all young boys then, inexperienced at that level. Now we have the knowledge and experience. I feel we have a very good team and we can possibly do better. Every time I represent my country and the national team I treat it as if it's my last (game). Definitely playing in the World Cup is the pinnacle of every player's career."

Fact file

Born: August 5, 1990
Club: Gold Coast United
Games: 7
Goals: 2
Previous clubs: Sydney United, Sydney Olympic, Ajax, Germinal Beerschot (loan), De Graafschap (loan), FC Twente, PSV Eindhoven
Australia games: 42
Australia goals: 1

to play in a club, be involved in a club and a team that I felt I could progress in and do better in," he reveals.

"There were options along the way to go to England, but I just felt it wasn't the right time and the right move and the right team for me, so I did knock back a couple of offers. I am always looking to better myself and be in an environment where I can express myself and get better.

"I won't name any teams, but it was clubs towards the bottom of the EPL table and there were a couple of Championship teams.

"I always want to be involved in a team that wins things, like PSV, and play in the Champions League – and they were not going to do that. I hope by coming back to Gold Coast I can continue that. I feel we have a great chance of winning the championship and playing in the Asian Champions League next year.

"Every player wants to test themselves against the best they can and, for us now in Asia, the ACL is a great club incentive."

While Culina's memories of the past two outings against Holland are good – a win in Eindhoven last year and a 1-1 draw in Rotterdam just before the 2006 World Cup – he, like his international teammates, has disappointing memories of the last foray into the Asian Cup in 2007.

I wanted to be part of something that was going to be successful.

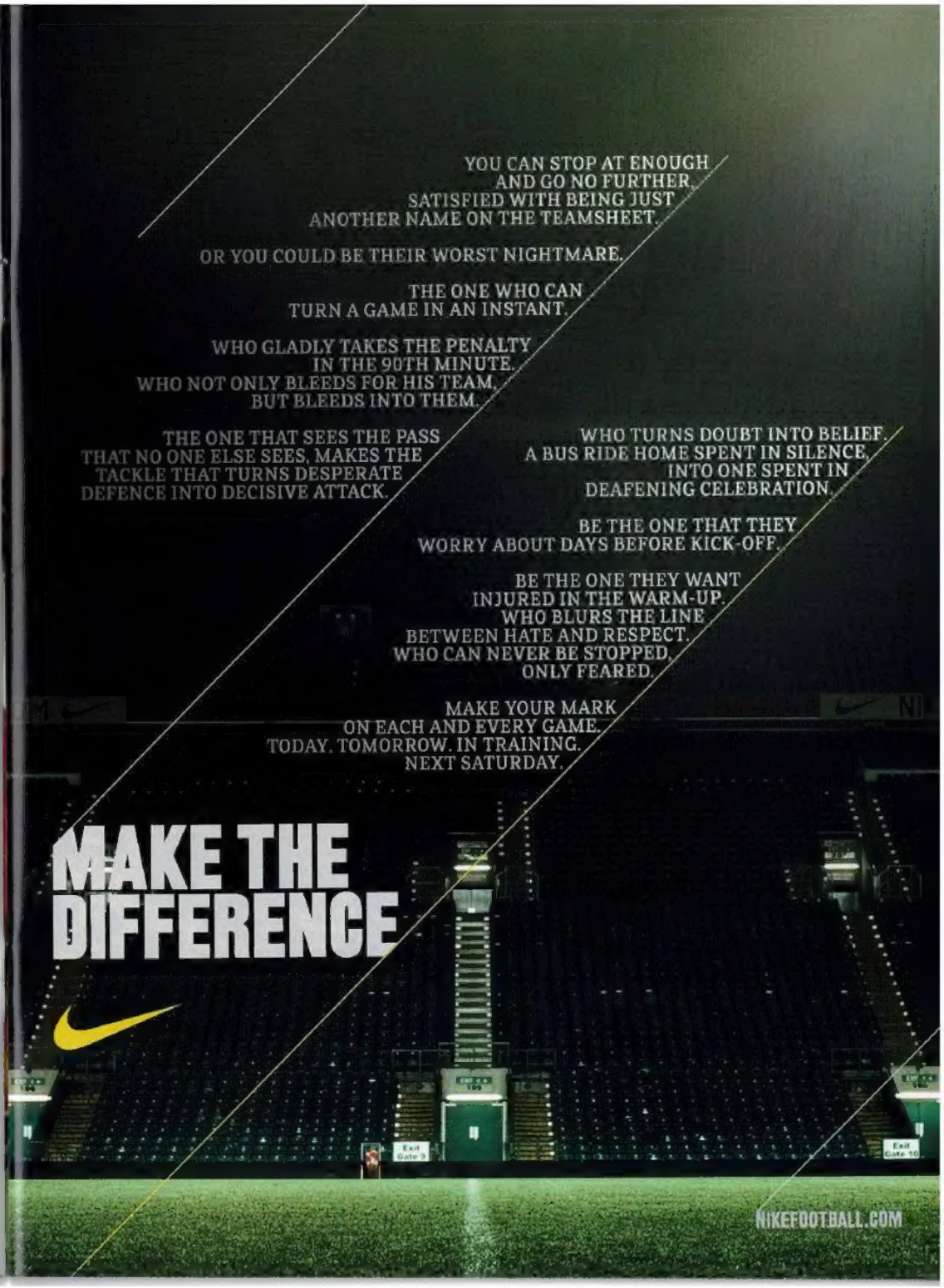
A last-gasp draw against Oman, a loss to Iraq and a win over Thailand ensured the Qantas Socceroos would make the knockout phase, but that's where it ended against Japan in a penalty shootout defeat in Hanoi.

While the new World Cup qualifying route through Asia ensured some testing workouts, it also gave the players great preparation and fresh insights for the Asian Cup qualifying campaign. And the key message, says Culina, is not to underestimate the quality of the opposition.

Sure, Australia got the better of Japan in its World Cup qualifying group with a win in Melbourne and a draw in Tokyo, but it was held to a goalless draw by Indonesia in Jakarta and defeated by Kuwait in Canberra in its first two Asian Cup qualifiers this year.

Admittedly, those past two matches did not feature all the leading European-based players, but the likes of Craig Moore and Archie Thompson were involved, and the results and challenges encountered in the Asian World Cup qualifying group show that nothing can be taken for granted.

"There's a lot more games involved in Asia, a lot more travelling, you are going to a lot more different places you have never been to before in different conditions and environments," Culina says. "It was all new to us and presented quite a challenge. Not scary, but things we didn't know. We have to be on our game." ●



Silk ROAD TO SOUTH AFRICA

In June next year, Australia will take part in the greatest sporting show on earth: the 2010 FIFA World Cup. TONY WILSON **gives a taste of what's to come.**

Australia's final round of World Cup qualifying began on the Silk Road in Tashkent, and never really got off it. It is not meant to be this smooth. Nigeria needs a miracle to qualify. Powerhouses such as Portugal and France are still sweating. Argentina is fifth in a South American slugfest where only the top four nations go through automatically. Its fans are terrified. Just like we were last time. And the time before that. World Cup qualification is meant to be terrifying.

And yet this time it hasn't been.

Well, that's not exactly true.

In the first qualifying stage in Kunming, China, the brilliant Mark Schwarzer gave away and then saved a penalty that might have represented our bacon. And the away fixture with Bahrain in Manama (cue Muppets song) was a 92-minute horror show with an ending so unjust and so wonderfully unlikely that it could have barely surprised more had the camera panned back to Mark Bresciano with a full head of hair.

But we kept winning. Nine points out of a possible nine. Then that brave draw with Japan after a difficult preparation in Yokohama. On June 6, 2009, we became the second country to earn qualification to South Africa, beaten out of first place only by the Blue Samurais enjoying an earlier kick-off time.

0-0 at home against Qatar in Doha was like a night at home cleaning the kitchen.

And yet the nation barely paused to celebrate. If John Aloisi's penalty was a pyrotechnic moment in the history of Australian sport, 0-0 against Qatar in Doha was like a night at home cleaning the kitchen. Yet the result was the same. As Fox Sports commentator Simon Hill put it when the final whistle blew that night: "It's not quite the party that it was in Sydney four years ago, but it will mean just as much. The Socceroos are off to join the world's biggest party – South Africa here they come."

Hill has called all but one of Australia's qualifiers in this campaign and, in his view, the latest effort is even more meritorious than 2005. "People have really underestimated how difficult this qualification was because the Socceroos made it look so easy. It's sometimes difficult for people back home to understand how hot it is in Qatar, or how body-sapping the altitude was in China," he says.

"While it's fair to say Australia did have the more straightforward of the two Asian groups, it was a road full of potholes – and they managed to avoid most of them."

In Germany in 2006, our 32-year absence from the World Cup finals meant fans couldn't realistically expect anything. Those mad 10 minutes against Japan would alone have been enough.

UNITED FRONT
As the Australian team warms up before the World Cup qualifier against Iraq in June 2008, Australian fans show their support.

But then there was an even better performance against Brazil, and the unforgettable heroics against Croatia. The Qantas Socceroos didn't just fall into the second round; they deserved to be there. And then came Kaiserslautern part II and Italy and a penalty that broke our hearts – if only because it was such an imperfect end to such a near perfect tournament. We couldn't complain (actually we could complain, and did!), but when we had all cooled down, we feted Guus Hiddink and the players, and dared to wonder if Australia might have stuck a Blundstone into the tiny puddle containing football's elite.

Expectations have changed this time around. Pim Verbeek has stated his sights are set on the last eight and beyond. The captain, Lucas Neill, is making similar noises, as though a failure to progress further than 2006 would constitute stagnation – an inability to atone for the pain inflicted by Italy.

Expectations have changed this time around. Pim Verbeek has stated his sights are set on the last eight and beyond.

And yet getting out of the group stage will still be a major achievement. This time, Australia will fly under nobody's radar. It was different in Germany. Who could forget USA coach Bruce Arena labelling the Socceroos, alongside Trinidad and Tobago, as the weakest teams at the tournament? Fans of other countries adopted us as their second team because of the way Hiddink had us playing, and because we were that beloved thing in sport – an overachieving underdog. But now the team's stellar form has lifted our world ranking to the mid-teens (Australia reached its highest spot of 14th in September 2009). We are for the first time a genuine threat, a contender. In South Africa, the rest of the world will be ready.

Having said that, our boys should be ready too. Another great advantage of taking the high road to qualification is that Pim can now experiment with personnel and formations. Already we have seen new names such as Rhys Williams, Shane Stefanutto, Nikita Rukavytsya, Dario Vidosic and Matthew Spiranovic. There's also a chance for middle-tier players who weren't part of the 2006 campaign to press their claims – players such as Brett Holman, Jade North, David Carney, Scott McDonald and Nick Carle. The FFA has already scheduled five matches between October and March. Four of these will be Asian Cup qualifiers and so the selectors for South Africa will scrutinise players under tournament pressure. The core of the squad, though, will be the same as it was for Germany.

For mine, our four best players are still Tim Cahill, Harry Kewell, Schwarzer and Neill. The next five are more debatable, but are probably Brett Emerton, Luke Wilkshire, Vince Grella, Jason Culina and Bresciano – all veterans of 2006. Josh Kennedy is still our best game-breaker. Craig Moore, at 33, and back from international retirement, still looks the best option alongside Neill. Should we be celebrating this remarkable stability or panicking over our apparent failure to unearth the next big thing? Or doing both? Celebrating because World Cup finals experience is rare and invaluable; panicking because old legs get tired, and because a fan's default position for contemplating World Cup performance is panic.

WORLD BEATERS
From left, Craig Moore, Tim Cahill and Harry Kewell show their delight against Croatia in the 2006 World Cup

Simon Hill admits to being a pessimist by nature, and says that he is worried too. "I know Pim is aiming for the last eight, but I reckon another second round exit would be a major success. A lot depends upon the draw," he says.

"They will miss (Mark) Viduka (in all likelihood), whose experience and hold-up play against strong teams would have been so useful.

"There are questions marks over the centre of defence, and can Pim overcome his cautious nature and really go for it if needs be?"

But as Hill is only too quick to point out, Australia's recent form says there's cause for optimism too. The first team to qualify in Europe was the Netherlands, and Pim's men beat them 2-1 in Eindhoven last September. The other best-credentialled team in Asia is Japan, and the Australians had its measure not just in that famous match at Kaiserslautern, but in the final qualifying fixture at the MCG. We have genuine quality: 'Super, Super Tim' would get a game for any national team on the planet. Kewell still has the pace and skill to beat defenders and manufacture miracles.

We have genuine quality: 'Super, Super Tim' would get a game for any national team on the planet.

Schwarzer is a phenomenon, as evidenced by 670 minutes in second stage qualifying without conceding a goal. And perhaps the most important of the lot is Neill, who showed on the biggest stage in Germany what he is worth. If any of those four get injured . . .

But if depth is our weakness, in Hill's view, spirit and resilience is our great strength. "I know it's an old chestnut, but the spirit of this team is phenomenal," he says.

"To get some of the results they have in recent years shows just how hard they work for each other, how much pride they have in playing for their country, and how much they trust Pim Verbeek."

I trust Verbeek too. Even in as banal a forum as a post-match interview, he speaks with a measured authority, tossing around reasoned analysis with support for his boys and just enough English syntax errors to keep us all entertained. If Pim is ever stupid enough to venture online, he'll discover a blazing debate on whether we should play a single man up front, or whether this set-up is too defensive. But given his record and the fact of qualification, few could dispute the FFA picked the right man. We love him. The Qantas Socceroos are one of the country's best-performed national teams this year. For that, Verbeek deserves much of the credit.

It will be interesting to see how many A-League players Verbeek selects in the final squad of 23. Barring injury, Culina and Moore appear to be certainties. Mile Sterjovski and Chris Coyne are well in contention.

A headache for Verbeek is that some of these players finish their seasons as early as February 2010, leaving them short of match practice for a tournament starting in June.

The solution? My answer is that the whole lot of them are loaned to Melbourne Victory for its Asian Champions League.

IN THE MIX
Will Brett Holman be going to the World Cup?

Who's on the plane?

Pim Verbeek and the selectors will choose a 23-man squad for the 2010 FIFA World Cup.

Certainties
- Mark Schwarzer (gk)
- Lucas Neill (def)
- Luke Wilkshire (def)
- Mark Bresciano (mid)
- Tim Cahill (mid)
- Jason Culina (mid)
- Brett Emerton (mid)
- Vince Grella (mid)
- Josh Kennedy (fwd)
- Harry Kewell (fwd)
- Scott McDonald (fwd)

Probables
- Brad Jones (gk)
- Scott Chipperfield (def)
- Craig Moore (def)
- Jade North (def)
- David Carney (mid)
- Brett Holman (mid)
- Carl Valeri (mid)

Possibles
- Adam Federici (gk)
- Ante Covic (gk)
- Michael Beauchamp (def)
- Chris Coyne (def)
- Patrick Kisnorbo (def)
- Adrian Madaschi (def)
- Mark Milligan (def)
- Shane Stefanutto (def)
- Jacob Burns (mid)
- Nick Carle (mid)
- Richard Garcia (mid)
- Mile Jedinak (mid)
- Mile Sterjovski (mid)
- Rhys Williams (mid)
- Bruce Djite (fwd)
- Nikita Rukavytsya (fwd)
- Archie Thompson (fwd)

Smokies
- Michael Petkovic (gk)
- Shane Lowry (def)
- Matthew Spiranovic (def)
- Dario Vidosic (fwd)
- Mark Viduka (fwd)

campaign. The FFA and the national selectors will probably settle for them being loaned anywhere.

Lastly, a footballing topic on which I can speak with authority. For all those undecided about whether to book their annual leave for June next year, do it!

I've heard from the 'It won't be as good as Germany' camp. I've heard from the 'I might just wait for Brazil in 2014' collective. My experience at France 1998 and Germany 2006 tells me that it is virtually impossible for a football fan to be unhappy at a World Cup. It is Disneyland for sports fans. Indeed, it's the 'It's a Small World' ride played over a month – joyous, inclusive, a reason to have faith in humanity's ability to connect across cultures and creeds.

It would be great even without the Socceroos, but the fact they have qualified is such a sweetener. This golden generation of footballers remains intact for one last campaign.

Get on board. South Africa 2010 will be unforgettable.

What's next?

THE KEY DATES IN THE COUNTDOWN TO SOUTH AFRICA.

October 10, 2009	Qantas Socceroos v Netherlands, Sydney Football Stadium, Sydney
October 14, 2009	Qantas Socceroos v Oman, Etihad Stadium, Melbourne
November 14, 2009	Oman v Qantas Socceroos, Muscat
December 4, 2009	FIFA World Cup Draw, Cape Town
January 6, 2010	Kuwait v Qantas Socceroos, Kuwait City
March 3, 2010	Qantas Socceroos v Indonesia, Suncorp Stadium, Brisbane
May 2010	World Cup squad selected; international friendly at MCG (opponent and date TBC)
June 2010	Squad travels to camp in South Africa (base city TBC)
June 11-July 11, 2010	World Cup finals in South Africa

TOP OF THE WORLD Reigning champion Italy will fancy its chances of retaining the trophy.

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Countdown To Qatar

A group-by-group update from the AFC Asian Cup qualifiers on the road to Qatar 2011. BY MICHAEL LYNCH

GULF IN CLASS? Khaled Mater surges forward in Kuwait's shock 1-0 win over Australia in Canberra in March.

Group A

Bahrain, which is on course to qualify for the World Cup for the first time if it can overcome New Zealand in the Oceania/Asia play-off, has made a bright start to its qualifying campaign with a maximum six points from two games.

The Bahrainis got things under way in January with a 3-1 win over Hong Kong, a result that would have been expected. But it was their next performance which sent shockwaves through the qualifying group as they saw off Asian powerhouse Japan in Manama later that month, a first-half goal from Salman Issa enough to give the tiny Persian Gulf country a crucial victory. The Japanese might not have fielded their best possible first-choice line-up, but it was a strong team nonetheless.

Japan earlier made heavy weather of beating Yemen 2-1 in Kumamoto in its opening match, goals to Okazaki Shinji and Tanaka Tatsuya sealing the points. Yemen will fancy its chances, however, as it still has to face Bahrain twice and Japan at home. Second half substitute Akram Al-Selwi scored in the 51st minute to earn a 1-0 win over Hong Kong.

Results: Japan 2 Yemen 1, Hong Kong 1 Bahrain 3, Yemen 1 Hong Kong 0, Bahrain 1 Japan 0.

Next fixtures: Japan v Hong Kong (October 8), Yemen v Bahrain (November 14).

Group B

Far from a walk in the park for regional heavyweight Australia, Group B has proved rather embarrassing so far for Pim Verbeek's side as it sits bottom of the table with only one point from two games.

Verbeek has had to rely on locally based players from the A-League, and they have struggled, drawing 0-0 in Jakarta against Indonesia in January and then crashing to a surprise defeat at home to Kuwait in March.

In a tight group, Oman leads, having beaten Kuwait 1-0 in Kuwait City, courtesy of Hassan Rabia's second half goal. The Kuwaitis, thanks to their 1-0 win in Canberra, are second, while Indonesia is a point ahead of the Qantas Socceroos after two scoreless draws, the other coming in Muscat against Oman.

If Australia is to get its campaign back on track, it has to grab three points in Melbourne against the Omanis and then take at least a point from the return fixture in November. Failure to qualify for the finals would be a disaster for a nation that aims to host the 2015 version.

Results: Oman 0 Indonesia 0, Kuwait 0 Oman 1, Indonesia 0 Australia 0, Australia 0 Kuwait 1.

Next fixtures: Australia v Oman (October 14), Kuwait v Indonesia (November 14).

Group C

It's a race between two teams – Uzbekistan and the United Arab Emirates – in Group C, with Malaysia seemingly serving as the whipping boy. India, which was the fourth team in this group, has already progressed to the finals (alongside host Qatar and the top three teams from the 2007 Asian Cup – Iraq, Saudi Arabia and South Korea), after winning the 2008 AFC Challenge Cup, a tournament for emerging footballing nations. The Indians defeated Tajikistan 4-1 in the final in New Delhi after the latter had surprisingly defeated North Korea in the semi-final. The winner of the 2010 AFC Challenge Cup will also get an automatic berth in the finals.

The Uzbeks are in the box seat in Group C, having defeated the UAE 1-0 at the Al Shariah Stadium, thanks to Farhod Tojiyev's first-half goal in January. The UAE smashed five past Malaysia in the opening game in Kuala Lumpur.

Results: Malaysia 0 United Arab Emirates 5, United Arab Emirates 0 Uzbekistan 1.

Next fixtures: Uzbekistan v Malaysia (November 14), Malaysia v Uzbekistan (November 18).

Group D

An intriguing group in which Syria, China or Vietnam could make it through, although the pressure will be on the Chinese to start delivering. Qualification for the 2002 World Cup promised much, but the Chinese have failed to build on that achievement. Syria tops the standings with a maximum six-point haul from the first two games, having beaten China 3-2 in Aleppo (with the help of two first-half penalties) and Lebanon 2-0 away from home.

Vietnam, surprise quarter-finalist in the last Asian Cup, started strongly with a 3-1 win over Lebanon in Hanoi, but then crashed 6-1 to China in foggy conditions, with striker Gao Lin bagging a hat-trick.

If Syria can win in Hanoi next month, it will have an excellent chance of going through, but the Vietnamese – backed by their fanatical home fans – will be desperate to regroup and rekindle their chances.

Results: Syria 3 China 2, Vietnam 3 Lebanon 1, China 6 Vietnam 1, Lebanon 0 Syria 2.

Next fixtures: Lebanon v China (November 14), Vietnam v Syria (November 14).

Group E

Another group which throws up myriad possibilities. All four teams have a chance of progressing. Iran is favourite, however, sitting on top with four points from two games.

The Iranians defeated Singapore easily (6-0) at the Azadi Stadium in Tehran, where the visitors collapsed in the second period. Iran, which had a poor 2010 World Cup qualifying campaign, and then took a useful point with a scoreless draw against Thailand in Bangkok.

The Singaporeans got themselves back on track after their mauling at the hands of Iran by defeating Jordan 2-1 at home in the National Stadium. The Thais are unbeaten after two games, having earned a point in Amman, courtesy of a scoreless draw with the Jordanians before another draw against Iran.

The Thais are difficult to break down, but need to improve their firepower if they are to finish in one of the top two spots. Iran should qualify with home games against Jordan and Thailand to come. Singapore must beat the Thais at home and get some sort of result in Amman in its final game to have much chance.

Results: Iran 6 Singapore 0, Jordan 0 Thailand 0, Singapore 2 Jordan 1, Thailand 0 Iran 0.

Next fixtures: Iran v Jordan (November 14), Singapore v Thailand (November 14).

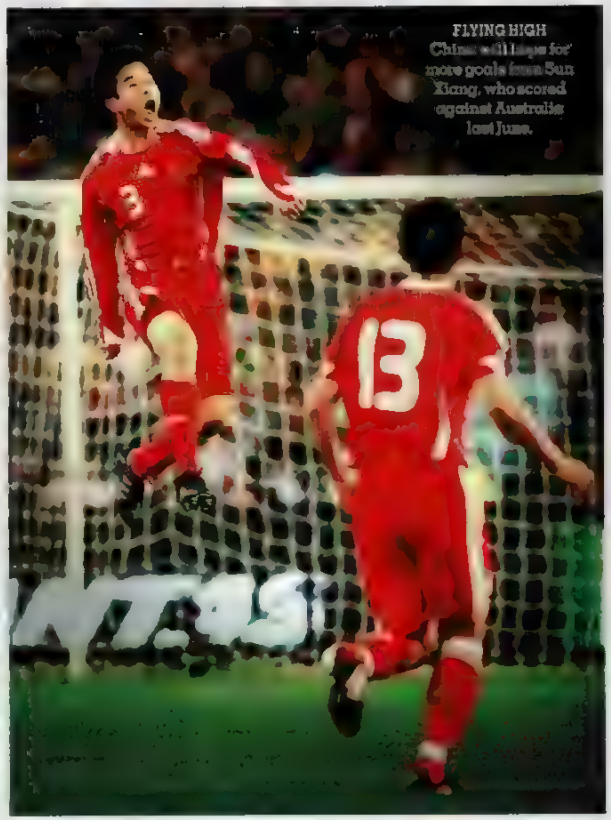
Group A						
Team	P	W	D	L	GD	Pts
BAHRAIN	2	2	0	0	3	6
JAPAN	2	1	0	1	0	3
YEMEN	2	1	0	1	0	3
HONG KONG	2	0	0	2	-3	0

Group B						
Team	P	W	D	L	GD	Pts
OMAN	2	1	1	0	1	4
KUWAIT	2	1	0	1	0	3
INDONESIA	2	0	2	0	0	2
AUSTRALIA	2	0	1	1	-1	1

Group C						
Team	P	W	D	L	GD	Pts
UAE	2	1	0	1	4	3
UZBEKISTAN	1	1	0	0	1	3
MALAYSIA	1	0	0	1	-5	0

Group D						
Team	P	W	D	L	GD	Pts
SYRIA						
CHINA						
VIETNAM						
LEBANON	2	0	0	2	-4	0

Group E						
Team	P	W	D	L	GD	Pts
IRAN						
SINGAPORE						
THAILAND						
JORDAN						



FLYING HIGH China will hope for more goals from Sun Xiang, who scored against Australia last June.

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Game day

FFA Chairman Frank Lowy AC

WELCOME NETHERLANDS

Tonight's friendly will be the perfect preparation for Wednesday's Asian Cup qualifier against Oman.

Thank you for attending this game between Australia and the Netherlands.

Happily, the Qantas Socceroos have qualified for the 2010 FIFA World Cup in South Africa next year, but there is still the very important matter of the AFC Asian Cup in January 2011.

This international, against the third-ranked nation in the world in the Netherlands, gives us a good opportunity to get the team together for one of the crucial AFC Asian Cup qualifier next week against Oman in Melbourne.

Of course, it also has special meaning and significance for the Dutch influence in Australian

Over the past four years many members of the Qantas Socceroos have had little or no off-season because of our international match schedule and all football fans – including me – are very appreciative of the players' time and commitment to the cause of qualifying for the Asian Cup.

We value and appreciate the opportunity to meet the Netherlands. It is a proud football nation which has given much to the world game.

Thank you to all our partners for their ongoing support.

My best wishes to both teams for a wonderful game tonight.

Frank Lowy AC
CHAIRMAN
FOOTBALL FEDERATION AUSTRALIA

AUSTRALIA

New South Wales Premier Nathan Rees

A WIN FOR FOOTBALL

The Qantas Socceroos and the Netherlands will serve up a great spectacle, and Sydney is the perfect venue to host the game.

It is a pleasure to welcome the Qantas Socceroos and the Netherlands to Sydney for tonight's high profile international friendly. There could be no better venue for the game than Sydney – Australia's global city and football capital.

By a happy coincidence tonight's match falls within Crave Sydney, a major new event celebrating food, outdoor art and comedy in Sydney's urban spaces and beautiful harbour.

This match also takes place at the beginning of the Sydney 2009 World Masters Games, the world's largest multi-sport event, which has attracted a record 30,000 participants from city.

Despite being an international friendly this is an important clash for both sides.

The Qantas Socceroos want to maintain their unbeaten record against the Netherlands at senior international level, while our visitors – the world's third ranked team – are keen to outplay their Australian counterparts.

Whatever the result, the match will be a real win for football as both sides journey towards the FIFA World Cup in South Africa in 2010.

The match-up between the Qantas Socceroos and the Netherlands is also part of Australia's wider campaign to host the FIFA World Cup in 2018 or 2022 and ensure that football continues to grow in support and popularity.

In all it will be one of the most dynamic and exciting football matches our nation has seen. And by coinciding with two major sporting and lifestyle festivals it is a vivid reminder that Sydney is a relaxed and open city with its arms open to the world.

I have a great evening and enjoy some of the best football you will see.

Nathan Rees MP
PREMIER OF NEW SOUTH WALES

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A new era dawns

The Dutch Influence

There has been a huge Dutch influence on Australian football in recent years. Tonight, the Netherlands will put aside any personal feelings as they aim for a first win over the Qantas Socceroos.

BY MICHAEL LYNCH

When Bert van Marwijk, the Netherlands coach, looks along the touchline to the opposing dugout at Sydney Football Stadium tonight, he could be forgiven for reminding himself he is not at a domestic game at Ajax's Amsterdam Arena or PSV Eindhoven's Philips Stadion.

Such is the Dutch influence in the Australian game these days that it would be an easy mistake to make. Not only is his Socceroo counterpart Pim Verbeek from the Netherlands, but so too is Verbeek's No. 2, Henk Duut, a man whom van Marwijk knows well, having worked closely with him at two clubs in their native country.

Verbeek and Duut (after Graham Arnold's temporary reign) have continued a Dutch thread that was first woven by Guus Hiddink. The legendary Dutchman (now coaching Russia) led Australia past the huge World Cup obstacle that was Uruguay in that classic final qualifier in November 2005 and on to the promised land of the finals in Germany in 2006.

Under Hiddink's inspirational man-management, big-game know-how and gambler's instinct for pulling off the unorthodox but successful tactical switch (not for nothing is he known as 'Lucky Guus' in Holland), Australia performed with distinction. The Qantas Socceroos got out of the group phase, only to lose to eventual world champion Italy in the first knockout stage.

Hiddink, who also employed one of the greatest players in the history of the Dutch game, Johan Neeskens, as his assistant, was in many ways the progenitor of what might be termed the 'Oranjification' of the Australian game. Had he not succeeded, Australian football authorities might not have been so keen to appoint so many of his countrymen.

Had Hiddink not succeeded, authorities might not have been keen to appoint so many of his countrymen.

But Hiddink rolled the dice and got it right, paving the way for a series of Dutch football men to claim key roles in the development of the Australian game.

Rob Baan, the vastly experienced footballing technocrat from Rotterdam, was the first, taking on the job of the FFA's technical director. And when he returned to Europe at the start of this year, another Dutchman, this time a native of Utrecht, Han Berger, took his place.

Berger has a long and formidable coaching record, having been in charge at several Dutch Eredivisie clubs, as well as having had a stint in control of the Netherlands' under-21 team. Since his appointment, he has sought to revolutionise the game at grassroots level in this country, introducing several reforms aimed at improving the technical skills base and organisation of the sport in Australia.

Verbeek is well known by now. The 53-year-old played as a defender for Sparta Rotterdam, NAC Breda and Roda JC in his native country, but has made a much greater impression as a coach, initially with several Dutch clubs, but more recently on the international stage.

Another Rotterdam native, Verbeek has strong links with Hiddink, having been his assistant coach when the pair led unfancied South Korea to the semi-finals of the 2002 World Cup. The joint host scored memorable wins over Portugal, Spain and Italy along the way before narrowly losing to Germany.

Verbeek took over as coach of the Koreans in 2006 and led the south-east Asian nation to the last four of the Asian Cup in 2007 before assuming the top job in Australia. He quickly recruited Duut, also from Rotterdam, to be his assistant. The tall Duut, a former centre back who was forced to retire from the game by illness in 1992, has worked as a coach ever since, alongside well-known figures such as van Marwijk and Ruud Gullit.

NEW RIVALRY
Philip Cocu and Lucas Neill contest possession in 2006

He assisted van Marwijk at both Fortuna Sittard and Feyenoord, worked with Verbeek when the pair took charge of the Netherlands Antilles national team for a brief period in 2004, and was Gullit's No. 2 when the talismanic Dutchman, one of the greatest players of his era, became manager of Feyenoord in 2004.

This thread of bright orange does not end there, however, as the man who is in charge of the development of Australia's brightest young players, Jan Versleijen – the head coach of the Young Socceroos and the Australian Institute of Sport's football program – is also a Dutchman.

Like his countrymen, the 54-year-old has extensive experience and has coached previously at club level in the Netherlands, Japan and across the Middle East. He has also worked within the Dutch national set-up, having overseen the under-17 and under-23 teams.

Not only is the Dutch influence felt at national level, though. The new Melbourne franchise in the A-League, Melbourne Heart, has been chasing a Dutch coach: it thought it had one when it settled on Henk van Stee, but he bowed out at the last minute.

For all the close links now established between the two nations, Australia and the Netherlands have not met that often on the pitch. The first time the two countries clashed was as recently as June 2006, in a warm-up match for the World Cup.

It pitted Hiddink against his native country, a team he had led to the semi-finals of the World Cup in 1998, and it turned out to be a bruising

The first time the countries clashed was as recently as June 2006, in a warm-up match for the World Cup.

and thrilling encounter in Feyenoord's De Kuip Stadium in Rotterdam.

The Dutch were strongly fancied to put Australia to the sword, but that's not how it transpired. The hosts had the better of a very physical game in a packed-out and noisy stadium.

Ruud Van Nistelrooy gave the Netherlands the lead in the 10th minute and, but for the heroics of Mark Schwarzer in goal, the hosts could have gone further ahead. The shot stopper, who at that time was waging an intense battle with Zeljko Kalac for the country's No. 1 goalkeeper position, had a tremendous game as the Dutch piled on the pressure.

Australia got itself back on level terms from the penalty spot in the 53rd minute after Mark Viduka was fouled by Joris Mathijsen in the

DUTCH A L'ORANGE
Dutch fans are famed for wearing their colours with pride

Key battles

The duels that will decide the match.

TOUGH TEST
John Heitinga will prove a tricky opponent for Harry Kewell.

Harry Kewell v John Heitinga

Kewell may lack the pace and physical gifts of his younger days, but he remains one of Australia's top players, either deployed in a central striking role (as he has been occasionally) or perhaps more effectively as an orthodox left-sided attacking midfielder, wording the flanks or drifting in to support a target man from deep positions. Heitinga is a regular in the Dutch team, who has recently joined Tim Cahill at Everton following spells at Ajax and Atletico Madrid earlier in his career. He can play as a right back, centre back or defensive midfielder.

Craig Moore/Lucas Neill v Klaas Jan Huntelaar

A prolific striker with a fearsome goalscoring record, Huntelaar will be a handful for Australia's central defensive partnership of Moore and Neill. At just 26, the man nicknamed 'The Hunter' has already played for three European giants – Ajax, Real Madrid and current club AC Milan. Huntelaar scored against Australia in 2008, and he will be looking to add to his impressive record of 14 goals from 26 appearances. After signing for Everton in mid-September, and missing out on a pre-season preparation following his departure from West Ham, Neill could be rusty from lack of match practice.

Vince Grella v Wesley Sneijder

Sneijder is a skilful, quick, attacking midfielder who is strong on the ball and plays a key role in the Netherlands' attacking set-up. Creative and talented, Sneijder began his career, as so many top Dutch players do, at Ajax before being sold to Real Madrid. He left the Spanish giant at the start of the 2009-10 season to join coach Jose Mourinho at Inter Milan. Grella, a mainstay of the Socceroo midfield, is a disciplined and committed defensive midfielder who will be asked to quell the influence of the small statured but hugely talented Sneijder.

DANGER MAN
Klaas Jan Huntelaar (below) will pose a major threat tonight

area. Viduka's penalty hit the crossbar, the ball coming back into play after hitting Dutch goalkeeper Edwin van der Sar and then the post. Tim Cahill, as he has done so often since, reacted quickest in the subsequent goalmouth scramble to slot an equaliser.

Things only got harder for Australia when Luke Wilkshire was sent off for a second yellow card offence on the hour when he upended Giovanni van Bronckhorst, leaving the Qantas Socceroos to battle on grimly for half an hour to finish on level terms. The Dutch weren't happy with what they considered had been an over-physical approach to a friendly, but Australia was unrepentant, reasoning it had warmed up for a tough World Cup group in the best possible way.

The other encounter between the two nations was equally memorable from an Australian point of view, also pitting a Dutchman – this time Verbeek against his native country. And the result was even better, the Qantas Socceroos running out 2-1 winners against a Holland side that was reduced to 10 men for the second half of the game.

The match in Eindhoven was a warm-up game before the final phase of Australia's Asian World Cup qualifying campaign last September. Verbeek's men were to take on

The other encounter between the two nations was equally memorable from an Australian point of view.

Asian dark horse Uzbekistan soon after, and wanted a good result and strong performance to build their confidence for what, at the time, shaped as a difficult away trip to Tashkent.

As in the Rotterdam match, things didn't start well for Australia as it conceded an early goal, with Klaas Jan Huntelaar slamming a left foot shot past Schwarzer in just the sixth minute. Australia regrouped and got itself back on level terms in the shadows of half time after goalkeeper Maarten Stekelenburg brought down Josh Kennedy to concede a spot kick, which Harry Kewell duly converted. Stekelenburg paid the ultimate price for his indiscretion and was shown a red card.

Australia got the deciding goal with 14 minutes left on the clock, and once more it was through a key intervention by beanpole striker Kennedy, who rose to direct a glancing header from Wilkshire's cross into the net. It was a historic result, and one which provided the Australians with the impetus to travel to Uzbekistan and grab a vital 1-0 away win to set up their final phase of their World Cup qualifying bid.

The Netherlands have since made light work of World Cup qualification themselves, breezing through their European qualification section to book their place in South Africa with a 100 per cent record. In September, the Dutch reached No. 3 in the FIFA World Rankings and, given their patchy record against Australia, will be keen to redress the balance in Sydney in what should be a compelling clash.

Good luck Qantas Socceroos.

AUSTRALIA

QANTAS SOCCEROOS

WRITE IN THE NUMBERS WHEN TONIGHT'S TEAMS ARE ANNOUNCED

GOALKEEPERS

- Ante Covic
- Mark Schwarzer

DEFENDERS

- Scott Chipperfield
- Patrick Kisnorbo
- [illegible] Lowry
- Mark Milligan
- Craig Moore
- Lucas Neill
- Luke Wilkshire

MIDFIELDERS

- Mark Bresciano
- Tim Cahill
- Nick Carle
- Davie Carney
- Jason Culina
- [illegible]
- [illegible]
- Brett Holman
- Mile Jedinak

STRIKERS

- Carl Valeri
- Rhys Williams
- Josh Kennedy
- Harry Kewell
- Scott McDonald
- Dario Vidosic

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KNVB

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- Piet Velthuizen
- Michel Vorm

DEFENDERS

- Khalid Boulahrouz
- Edson Braafheid
- John Heitinga
- Glenn Loovens
- [illegible]
- Giovanni van Bronckhorst

MIDFIELDERS

- Nigel de Jong
- Demy de Zeeuw
- [illegible]
- Orlando Engelaar
- David Mendes da Silva
- [illegible]
- Wesley Sneijder
- Rafael van der Vaart

STRIKERS

- Ryan Babel
- Klaas Jan Huntelaar
- Dirk Kuyt

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GAME ON SOLO

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FOXTEL

Meet the Qantas Socceroos

The players selected in Pim Verbeek's squad for tonight's game earn their living all across the world.

TOGETHER AGAIN
Members of tonight's Australian squad play club football in 12 countries.

Diversity is the word when it comes to the Qantas Socceroos. The 24 players in Pim Verbeek's squad for tonight's match against the Netherlands might all play international football for Australia but, when it comes to club football, they are dotted in different corners of the globe.

Together, they play for 22 clubs in 12 different countries. England is by far the most popular nation of choice, with six players earning a living with Premier League clubs, a couple more in the Championship, and Patrick Kisnorbo for table-topping Leeds United in League One.

But after that, it's like the start line of an Olympic marathon: all manner of countries are represented.

David Carney and Brett Holman play in the Netherlands, just to the east there's Dario Vidosic in Germany, with Mark Bresciano and Carl Valeri down south in Italy's Serie A and Serie B.

Ante Covic is in Sweden, Scott Chipperfield in Switzerland, and Scott McDonald in Scotland. Approaching the eastern boundaries of Europe, you'll find Harry Kewell and Mile Jedinak (both playing in Turkey), and Luke Wilkshire (Russia), while you have to go all the way to the Far East to track down Josh Kennedy (Japan) and Mark Milligan (China).

Only two members of the squad – Jason Culina and Craig Moore – play in their home nation, for A-League sides Gold Coast United and Brisbane Roar respectively.

Look at the Netherlands squad, and it's a similar story, with players turning out for teams in many of Europe's dominant football nations.

Truth be told, it's simply a sign of football's global appeal that players travel far and wide to earn their trade, and are no longer satisfied just to stay at home.

Tonight, though, regardless of where they play, the Qantas Socceroos will all be as one, playing for the green and gold.

The Players

Pim Verbeek selected a 24-man squad for tonight's match against the Netherlands, made up of two goalkeepers, seven defenders, 11 midfielders and four strikers.

Goalkeeper

Ante Covic

AGE: 34

CLUB: IF ELFSBORG (SWE)

APPEARANCES: 2

Now representing IF Elfsborg in Sweden, Covic has the experience of 70 international caps. The veteran surprised many to come into the Qantas Socceroos squad for the World Cup qualifiers against Uruguay in 2005. Renowned for having a safe pair of hands, Covic won the 2007 Grand Final with Newcastle Jets in the A-League before making the move overseas to Sweden.

Goalkeeper

Mark Schwarzer

AGE: 37

CLUB: FULHAM (ENG)

APPEARANCES: 70

The most-capped Australian goalkeeper in history, Schwarzer continues to defy his age and be one of the most consistent players for the Qantas Socceroos. Currently playing for Fulham after leaving Middlesborough at the end of the 2007-08 season, Schwarzer is a great shot-stopper from close range, typified by his memorable efforts in the World Cup qualifiers in 2005.

Defender

Scott Chipperfield

AGE: 33

CLUB: FC BASEL (SWZ)

APPEARANCES: 61

Chipperfield began his career at the Wollongong Wolves, and played a starring role in back-to-back NSL titles for the club in 2000 and 2001. He attracted overseas interest, and moved to FC Basel in the Swiss league, where he has enjoyed significant success. On the international stage, Chipperfield has been a reliable defender, who is also capable of playing as a midfielder.

Defender

Patrick Kisnorbo

AGE: 28

CLUB: LEEDS UTD (ENG)

APPEARANCES: 16

Kisnorbo grew up in Melbourne, but the tough defender rejected interest from Melbourne Victory in the off-season to sign with Leeds United from fellow English side Leicester. Having been out of the Qantas Socceroos squad for two years, Kisnorbo returned in the 3-0 win over the Republic of Ireland in August and scored his first goal for Australia against the Korea Republic in September.

Defender

Shane Lowry

AGE: 20

CLUB: ASTON VILLA (ENG), PLYMOUTH ARGYLE (ENG)

APPEARANCES: 0

The surprise selection of the Qantas Socceroos squad, Lowry received his first Australian call-up after pledging his future to the green and gold in September, having previously represented the Republic of Ireland at junior levels. The highly rated defender joined English Premier League side Aston Villa at 15, and is currently on loan with Plymouth Argyle in the English Championship.

Defender

Mark Milligan

AGE: 24

CLUB: SHANGHAI SHENHUA (CHI)

APPEARANCES: 8

Milligan made his Qantas Socceroos debut in 2006 after gaining experience as the country's under-23 skipper. The tough defender went on to play a prominent role in the 2007 Asian Cup, but has since had limited opportunities. After stints in the A-League with Sydney FC and Newcastle Jets, he is now with Chinese side Shanghai Shenhua, and has played in the AFC Champions League.

Defender

Craig Moore

AGE: 33

CLUB: BRISBANE ROAR (AUS)

APPEARANCES: 43

A regular defender for the Qantas Socceroos since making his debut in 1995, Moore's presence down back continues to prove valuable. Cool under pressure, but also a tough tackler, he was vital in helping Australia progress to the second round in the last World Cup, scoring a penalty against Croatia. Moore returned home to captain Brisbane Roar in 2007.

Defender

Lucas Neill

AGE: 31

CLUB: EVERTON (ENG)

APPEARANCES: 50

Neill recently joined international teammate Tim Cahill at Everton, having left English Premier League outfit West Ham. A leader on and off the field, he proved himself as an elite player at the last World Cup, demonstrating his ability as a strong defender who is capable in the air but also a smart playmaker. Neill captained Australia throughout its World Cup qualifying campaign.

Defender

Luke Wilkshire

AGE: 28

CLUB: DINAMO MOSCOW (RUS)

APPEARANCES: 35

A surprise inclusion in Guus Hiddink's World Cup line-up of 2006, Wilkshire's stature as a player has grown in leaps and bounds since. His three-year stint at Dutch club FC Twente came to an end last season when he moved east to join Russian giant Dinamo Moscow. Wilkshire occupies a regular position in the Qantas Socceroos defence and, on occasions, midfield.

Midfielder

Mark Bresciano

AGE: 29

CLUB: PALERMO (ITA)

APPEARANCES: 51

Bresciano is still best remembered for scoring the goal in the World Cup qualifier against Uruguay in 2005 that helped Australia qualify for Germany, but the physical and brilliant midfielder has been a strong performer for many years. The Palermo star played a pivotal role in the recent World Cup qualifying campaign and has scored 11 goals for the Qantas Socceroos.

Midfielder

Tim Cahill

AGE: 29

CLUB: EVERTON (ENG)

APPEARANCES: 34

Perhaps Australia's best player, and certainly its most prolific goalscorer, Cahill's aggression, class and prominence in the air make him one of the hardest players to stop. The Everton star will go down in Australian sporting history for his two late goals against Japan in the 2006 World Cup in Germany, and his strong form looks ominous heading into South Africa 2010.

Midfielder

Nick Carle

AGE: 27

CLUB: CRYSTAL PALACE (ENG)

APPEARANCES: 11

Carle won the Johnny Warren Players' Player of the Year award in 2007 in the A-League for his performances with Newcastle Jets which sparked a return to the national side. He transferred to Bristol City in 2008 and then moved to fellow English Championship side Crystal Palace. At one time, Carle seemed unlikely to make it back into national colours, but he has defied the odds.

Midfielder

David Carney

AGE: 25

CLUB: FC TWENTE (NLD)

APPEARANCES: 20

Carney played alongside Wayne Rooney at youth level, and holds some of the same attributes as the star striker. Exciting and quick, Carney made his international debut in 2006 and, in 2008, decided to play for Australia in the Olympics instead of going to pre-season training with Sheffield United. He left the Blades at the end of last season to join FC Twente in the Dutch Eredivisie.

Midfielder

Jason Culina

AGE: 29

CLUB: GOLD COAST UNITED (AUS)

APPEARANCES: 42

Culina started in all four of Australia's games in the last World Cup, and has been an important and regular member of the squad for several years. A midfielder always looking to attack and push forward, Culina has a proven ability to score goals. His return to Australia this year, after leaving PSV Eindhoven to play for Gold Coast United, has proved a massive coup for the A-League. A key member of the team.

Midfielder

Brett Emerton

AGE: 30

CLUB: BLACKBURN (ENG)

APPEARANCES: 69

Emerton returns to the international fold for the first time since suffering a serious knee injury for English Premier League side Blackburn in January. Pim Verbeek will be desperate for the versatile veteran to get back to his marauding best, playing either as a right-back or winger. Emerton, who spent many years with Feyenoord, boasts tremendous stamina and brings crucial experience to the team.

Midfielder

Vince Grella

AGE: 30

CLUB: BLACKBURN (ENG)

APPEARANCES: 41

Australia's senior defensive midfielder, Grella focuses most of his time on closing down opposition players. He has become an integral part of the line-up since establishing himself in the side in 2006. After many years in Italy with Empoli, Parma and Torino, he is now a regular for Blackburn, alongside Brett Emerton, in the English Premier League. One of the most experienced players in the Australian squad.

Midfielder

Brett Holman

AGE: 25

CLUB: AZ ALKMAAR (NLD)

APPEARANCES: 19

After playing a bit-part role in AZ Alkmaar's Eredivisie title campaign last season, Holman has been a regular this term and is getting valuable experience in the UEFA Champions League. Now in his eighth season in the Netherlands, the speedy midfielder appears primed to take the next step for Australia and become a regular, after missing out on selection for the 2006 World Cup.

Midfielder

Mile Jedinak

AGE: 25

CLUB: ANTALYASPOR (TUR)

APPEARANCES: 6

Jedinak made his international debut against Singapore in early 2008 and looks to have made a good impression on Verbeek and the coaching staff. He starred with Central Coast in the A-League, before switching to Genclerbirligi in the Turkish Super League. After not getting much game time this year, he moved to Antalyaspor to increase his chances of national selection.

Midfielder

Carl Valeri

AGE: 25

CLUB: GROSSETO (ITA)

APPEARANCES: 17

After joining Italian giant Inter Milan in 2004, but failing to play a game for the Serie A side, Valeri has found his niche as captain of Serie B side Grosseto in recent seasons. A no-nonsense defensive midfielder, he looms as a potential successor to Vince Grella. Expect him to add many more caps to his 17 appearances for the Qantas Socceroos in years to come. Good chance for the World Cup squad.

Midfielder

Rhys Williams

AGE: 21

CLUB: MIDDLESBROUGH (ENG)

APPEARANCES: 2

Striker

Josh Kennedy

AGE: 27

CLUB: NAGOYA GRAMPUS (JAP)

APPEARANCES: 15

Striker

Harry Kewell

AGE: 31

CLUB: GALATASARAY (TUR)

APPEARANCES: 42

Striker

Scott McDonald

AGE: 26

CLUB: CELTIC (SCO)

APPEARANCES: 13

Striker

Dario Vidosic

AGE: 22

CLUB: FC NURNBERG (GER)

APPEARANCES: 1

Football Federation Australia Staff

Phillip Wolanski	Head of Delegation
Pim Verbeek	Head Coach
Gary Moretti	Team Manager
Graham Arnold	Assistant Coach
Henk Duut	Assistant Coach
Tony Franken	
Darren Burgess	Conditioner
	Doctor
	Senior Physiotherapist
	Physiotherapist
	Equipment Manager
Marino Tolico	Equipment Assistant
Adam Mark	Media Manager
Lindsay McNeill	TV Unit
Mark Saliba	Security
Miguel Angel Escalante Bello	Chef

The Coaches

Coach

Pim Verbeek

AGE 58

POSITION HEAD COACH

Assistant

Henk Duut

AGE 45

POSITION ASSISTANT COACH

Assistant

Graham Arnold

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Ones to Watch

Meet five Netherlands players who could cause Australia plenty of problems tonight. BY CALLUM TWOMEY

Giovanni van Bronckhorst

In August, the 34-year old van Bronckhorst was named as the Netherlands captain by coach Bert van Marwijk, and it was richly deserved for the skilful utility. Van Bronckhorst made his debut for the national side in 1996 and has since gone on to earn almost 100 international caps, with highlights including two strong World Cup campaigns in France in 1998 and Germany in 2006. In France, van Bronckhorst was a major reason behind the Netherlands' progress to the semi-final stage. The skipper is a left-sided player who can play at full-back or in the midfield, and has represented Rangers, Arsenal and Barcelona. He is currently back with Feyenoord, the club where he began his career.

Dirk Kuyt

The Liverpool star has been a constant fixture in the Dutch side since emerging in 2004. After five years with Utrecht, he joined Feyenoord in 2003 before signing with the Reds in 2006. Since moving to Anfield, Kuyt has never looked back, making more than 150 appearances and scoring more than 40 goals. Aggressive, attacking and known for his tireless work rate, Kuyt can play as a striker, but is often used as a winger by club and country. He has made more than 50 appearances for the national team and had a strong Euro 2008 tournament. At only 29, he is in his prime.

Maarten Stekelenburg

Stekelenburg was the man chosen to follow in the giant footsteps of Edwin van der Saar when the great goalkeeper announced his international retirement in 2008 after 130 caps. The 27-year-old played in most of the Netherlands' successful World Cup qualifying campaign, where they conceded just two goals in eight games. Stekelenburg, who made his international debut in 2004 and has 21 caps, has been Ajax's first choice keeper since 2005. He will be hoping for a better performance against Australia than when the teams last met in 2008 after being sent off for a foul on Josh Kennedy.

Wesley Sneijder

One of several superstars in the Dutch camp, Sneijder has the ability to open up any game with his guile, vision and quick train of thought. He is a skilful attacking midfielder with a knack of scoring important goals, as evidenced by his first goal for new club Inter Milan last weekend – a 93rd minute winner against Udinese. In 57 appearances for his country, he has scored 12 times. Sneijder came of age on the international scene in Euro 2008, scoring against both France and Italy, the latter a stunning volley past Gianluigi Buffon. He was named in the team of the tournament. The Sydney crowd will be hoping to catch a glimpse of his class.

Nigel de Jong

While the Dutch team is littered with skilful stars, de Jong brings some steel to the side. The midfielder enforcer made his debut in the national side in 2004 as a 20-year old and has gone on to win almost 40 national caps. A product of the Ajax system, he made 96 appearances for the Dutch giant before moving to Hamburg in Germany in 2006. In January's transfer window, de Jong was snapped up by Manchester City in England and has played a pivotal role in the Mark Hughes' team. He helped his country qualify for the 2010 World Cup with his first goal against Iceland in June.

INVASION
Dirk Kuyt (above) and Giovanni van Bronckhorst (right)

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GREAT EXPECTATIONS: Pim Verbeek hopes Australia can do something special in South Africa.

Q&A
Pim and Proper

As Pim Verbeek nears two years in charge of Australia, it's hard to fault his record so far, with the Qantas Socceroos safely qualified for South Africa and ranked 14th in the world. ASHLEY BROWNE spoke to the coach on the eve of the Netherlands/Oman double-header.

Let's start with the Asian Cup. Compared to the successful World Cup campaign, we're a bit behind the eight-ball in this one.

We haven't done well so far. It's as simple as that. We got a draw in Indonesia, which was OK. You'd take a draw in an away game when you haven't had any preparation, and we didn't have an experienced team. Then came Kuwait, which is a tough team, an experienced team and they did well against us defensively. We just couldn't find any space. One counter-attack and that was it, which can happen in international football. Again, we played an inexperienced team, but we learned a lesson and a hard one at that. So we're three points behind (group leader) Oman, which means we have to win both the matches against Oman.

You've been involved in Asian football for quite some time now. Do you think the standard is improving?

It is, but Asian football is so broad. Football in Japan, Korea and China is different to football in the Middle East. We've played Qatar a few times, but Oman won the Gulf Cup of Nations last year, so that tells me enough. They're physically and technically strong and they have no players who play abroad, so they can have training camps and lots of practice together, which makes them difficult to beat. But we're playing them at home and we haven't lost at home, except for the Kuwait game where the circumstances were a little bit different. We have to win this game.

> The most important game for me was my first game in charge, in Melbourne against Qatar. That was particularly special, but I've enjoyed every camp, every minute so far.

What does it mean to you to be coaching the Qantas Socceroos in Australia against your Dutch countrymen?

At one level, it doesn't matter whether it's Holland, England or Oman but, once the boys are on the field, it will feel different. But we have already played against the Netherlands over there, and that was really special because it was in a Dutch stadium with the Dutch fans. It was good. But the most important thing for me is that they're one of the best sides in the world and it will be a really good test for us to play them. They've won nine of their last 10, so that should tell you how good they are. But this game is about testing players against such a good team. The result doesn't mean that much so, in that respect, the Oman game is more important. But it's great to have the Dutch team in Sydney. ❱

We don't often get one of the great European nations travelling to Australia. Do you see the fact they're willing to come here as a compliment to the Qantas Socceroos?

They've played in Australia before but for them, it's a great opportunity to travel together and to do some team building. It's a long trip for them, but I know the players and coaches are very excited to come here. We have a good team, so it will be a test for them.

You've been coach of Australia for nearly two years. How would you sum up your time at the helm so far?

More difficult than I expected, to be honest. I think we all underestimate the travel, the time differences and the different types of games we have had to play in the last 18 months. But the boys have been fantastic, always doing what's asked of them, never complaining, and it's been a great campaign so far. There's nothing more I could have asked for. We have developed a deep squad with lots of players to choose from and we have an interesting nine months ahead of us to pick the best 23 to take to South Africa. But it has been a fantastic time so far and I'm very much looking forward to the nine months ahead of us.

> We will try to win through from the group stage, as we did in 2006, and then anything is possible. That's how it is in football.

Australia's football loyalties are split four ways between football, rugby league, rugby union and AFL. Nevertheless, do you sense we're becoming a more football-savvy nation?

I still have to get used to the fact that football doesn't dominate the TV and the newspapers. For a European, that was hard to understand and you have to be here for 18 months like I have been to appreciate Australia and its sporting culture. But the A-League was doing well even before I got here and the stadiums were filling up. We have more teams now, the FFA has really established itself and people are enjoying the domestic season. I think Aussie football is doing really well.

What are the biggest challenges facing the game here going forward?

We all like to do things quickly but in this world, that's not always possible because you have some sports here that are very strong. The A-League needs to grow step by step, more foreign players are starting to play in it and having the Socceroos coming back to play regularly is also a positive. That needs to continue and is probably the most important thing.

What has been the highlight of your time in charge of Australia?

Difficult to say. The most important game for me was my first game in charge, in Melbourne against Qatar. That was particularly special, but I've enjoyed every camp, every minute so far. The first game was good, as was the game where we finally qualified for the World Cup (the draw with Qatar) because, after all, that's the reason I came here.

You probably aren't going to bite on this one, but have you pencilled any names for the starting XI come the opening match in South Africa?

I haven't made any decisions on that. There are some players who have played in

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a lot of our matches the last two years, but there are still nine months to go and so many things can happen in football. It's a tough sport and there are a lot of tough matches, especially for our European players in April and May next year. I have an idea, but let's wait and see.

At what stage will you start to settle the team down, or are you still experimenting?

The Korea Republic game (in September) was the end of the test phase. We played Ireland (in August) with a new team and players but from now on we will play the best available players. It's time to start winning games.

Nine months out, what do you think is a realistic goal for Australia in next year's World Cup?

It is too far out. We don't yet know who will be in our group but, it's like I said after we clinched qualification, we will try to win through from the group stage as we did in 2006, and then anything is possible. That's how it is in football.

Which teams have caught your eye so far during World Cup qualifying and who might be the teams to beat?

Argentina is usually one of the favoured teams before the World Cup, yet it is having trouble qualifying. That shows you the depth in international football. But it's a lot of the same teams – Spain, England, Germany, the Netherlands, Russia are playing Germany, which will be a huge game. The South Americans are strong, so are Nigeria and Ghana and the Ivory Coast as well. But there will be surprises, which is what makes the World Cup so interesting. We have a chance, maybe not to be the champions, but to do something special.

How advanced is the planning for once the team arrives in South Africa?

Our plans are more or less ready. We're just waiting for a few other details to be confirmed. We need to see the draw, so that we can work backwards from, when our first game is. So once we get to December we can finalise things, but our planning so far has been excellent.

IN CHARGE
Verbeek has won the respect of the players, and the fans, in almost two years as coach.

Have you been to South Africa to check out the facilities and potential training camp venues?

Not recently. I was there in March, but a few of us from the FFA have been there and we have found some nice locations. We just need to wait for the draw (which will take place on December 4).

Do you think South Africa will stage a good World Cup?

It's difficult for me to say because the stadiums and the training venues weren't ready when I was there, which was OK because there were still 15 months to go. It was different to Germany, which already had so many facilities in place. What I can say is that they were very excited and were working particularly hard, so I've got no doubt it will be a great World Cup.

Once the World Cup is over, have you given any plans to what you might do next?

I haven't thought about that. My contract and my planning is all around the World Cup. I have learned in my 25 years that you can't look too far ahead so for now it is finding the best 23 players and getting past the group stage of the World Cup. I can't think about anything more than that.

Fact file

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[illegible]	$20
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A1	Shane Smeltz	(J. Warren Medal)
A2	Scott Jamieson	(Rising Star)
A3	Shane Smeltz	(Goal Of The Year)
A4	Shane Smeltz	(Golden Boot)
A5	Tom Pondeliak	(Joe Marston Medal)

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1 Star player from each of the 10 clubs has signed 300 cards each.

SC1	Eugene Galekovic (Adel.)	$55
SC2	Michael Zullo (Roar)	$55
SC3	Adrian Caceres (Mariners)	$55
SC4	Michael Thwaite (Gold Coast)	$55
SC5	Billy Celeski (Victory)	$65
SC6	Tarek Elrich (Newcastle)	$60
SC7	Robbie Fowler (Fury)	$140
SC8	Adriano Pellegrino (Perth)	$55
SC9	Steve Corica (Sydney)	$65
SC10	Leo Bertos (Wellington)	$55

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1 2008 QANTAS Socceroos (30) 1:4 Pks
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Playmaker Set (16) $210/set

PM1	Travis Dodd	$15
PM2	Diego Walsh	$15
PM3	John Hutchinson	$15
PM4	Ahmad Elrich	$15
PM5	Archie Thompson	$15
PM6	Danny Allsopp	$15
PM7	Matt Thompson	$15
PM8	Adam Griffiths	$15
PM9	Jamie Harnwell	$15
PM10	Nejam Sekulovski	$15
PM11	Matt McKay	$15
PM12	Massimo Murdocca	$15
PM13	Steve Corica	$15
PM14	Terry McFlynn	$15
PM15	Tim Brown	$15
PM16	Daniel	$15

3 Medal Cards (6) $20 each
Set (6) $110

M1	Joel Griffiths	$25
M2	Joel Griffiths	$20
M3	Gary Van Egmond	$20
M4	Brendon Santalab	$20
M5	Bruce Djite	$20
M6	Michael Theoklitos	$20

4 Signature Cards (8)
[illegible] numbered cards each

A1	Cassio	$60
A2	Alex Wilkinson	$55
A3	Rodrigo Vargas	$85
A4	Adam Griffiths	$65
A5	Jamie Harnwell	$60
A6	Craig Moore	$65
A7	Tony Popovic	$65
A8	Shane Smeltz	$65

2007/08 Hyundai A-League TRADING CARDS
FACTORY BOX (32 pks) $125

2007 Hyundai A-League Album (No pages) $20
Base Set: (130) $40

SUBSET:
1 2007 QANTAS Socceroos (30)
$140/set 1:4 Packs.

2. 2006 Hyundai A League Medal (5)
$20-25 each 1: 32 Packs.

M1	Nick Carle	$25
M2	Danny Allsop	$25
M3	Ernie Merrick	$20
M4	Nick Carle	$20
M5	Adrian Leijer	$20

3. Legend Heroes (8) 1:16 Packs

L1	Adrian Alston	$15
L2	Graham Arnold	$15
L3	Ray Baartz	$15
L4	David Mitchell	$15
L5	Jimmy Rooney	$15
L6	Alex Tobin	$15
L7	Paul Wade	$15
L8	Charlie Yankos	$15

4 Hyundai A-League Signatures (8)
From $50-85 1:32 Packs

A1	Nathan Burns	$60
A2	Dean Heffernan	$50
A3	Danny Allsopp	$85
A4	Stuart Musialik	$50
A5	David Tarka	$50
A6	Matt McKay	$50
A7	Alex Brosque	$50
A8	Ross Aloisi	$60

5 Tribute Card (1) 1:120 Packs)
Jonny Warren Tribute
Gold Foiled Signature $50/each

2006/07 Hyundai A-League CARD SERIES
Factory Box (32 packs) $125

Official Hyundai A-League Album (No pages) $25
Base Set (100) $40

SUBSET:
[illegible] QANTAS Socceroos (30)
1 per 4 packs.
QANTAS Socceroos Set (30) $150/set
From SR1 SR30

2 Hyundai A-League Logo Foil Cards (8)
$8/each 1 per 8 packs

3. Hyundai A-League Signature Cards (8)

1 per 28 packs:

A1	Travis Dodd (Adel)	$65
A2	John Hutchinson (Mariners)	$60
A3	Archie Thompson (Melb)	$100
A4	Nick Carle (Newcastle)	$65
A5	Noah Hickey (NZ)	$55
A6	Stan Lazaridis (Perth)	$65
A7	Chad Gibson (QLD)	$55
A8	David Carney (Sydney)	$85

4 Mark Videka Tribute Signature (120 only)
1:850 packs. NA.

ACTION REPLAY

QANTAS SOCCEROOS vs. BAHRAIN

AUSTRALIA

With its place in South Africa already assured, Australia celebrated its World Cup qualification with a solid performance against Bahrain, and yet another clean sheet. BY HOWARD KOTTON

It was far from the free-flowing game that many fans had hoped for, but Australia was full of commitment as it continued its impressive run through the final round of Asian World Cup qualifying matches.

With the Qantas Socceroos already having qualified for the World Cup after a 0-0 draw against Qatar in Doha the previous weekend, there was a lack of intensity in the game, and it rarely reached great heights in front of almost 40,000 on a bitterly cold night at Sydney's ANZ Stadium.

After a slow start, Australia took control of the match in the second half despite squandering a series of chances to win by a bigger margin.

Second-half goals from Mile Sterjovski and David Carney enabled Australia to maintain its unbeaten record with a 2-0 win.

Striker Scott McDonald missed a golden chance to score and break his international drought on 25 minutes, firing a volley over the crossbar when he had plenty of time to steady himself.

The Qantas Socceroos came out after the interval with renewed vigour and desperation, and it wasn't long before they broke the deadlock when Sterjovski pounced on a defensive error to score.

Then in the dying minutes, Carney reacted quickly to poke home a rebound after a bicycle kick by Jason Culina had crashed into the post.

Australia was unlucky not to score a third with Harry Kewell also hitting the woodwork. Kewell relished the freedom of his role as a floating winger/striker, providing skill and run on the wing. Not only did he set up Sterjovski's goal, but he also played his part in several other scoring chances.

Mark Schwarzer continued his impressive record in the qualifying matches with a seventh successive clean sheet.

Minus the services of several stars including Tim Cahill, Mark Bresciano and Brett Emerton, coach Pim Verbeek had good reason to be happy with the performances of several players, including defender Mark Milligan.

"I think we created enough chances to score more than two goals," Verbeek said. "We were probably not really sharp enough to finish it off.

"A lot of new players came into the team but if you win the game 2-0, I think you've done everything you have to do."

After the match, Schwarzer launched a spirited defence of the team's tactics.

"I'm extremely proud (of) the way the whole team and management have gone about their job the whole campaign. They've been extremely professional," he said.

"It's very hard to understand how difficult the conditions (in Asia) are at times. You need to go away and just get the job done. Sometimes it's not pretty."

ANZ Stadium, June 10, 2009

Qantas Socceroos	2 (Sterjovski 55, Carney 89)
Bahrain	0

AERIAL ACROBATICS Jason Culina turned on the style with this thrilling overhead kick in the World Cup qualifier against Bahrain.

ACTION REPLAY

QANTAS SOCCEROOS vs. JAPAN

AUSTRALIA

It was déjà vu for Japan as two Tim Cahill goals sealed another Qantas Socceroos' come-from-behind win. BY HOWARD KOTTON

Tim Cahill proved Japan's bogeyman again as he spearheaded Australia's 2-1 victory in its final Asian World Cup qualifying match in Melbourne.

Down 1-0 at the interval, the Everton star scored twice in the second half to seal victory for the Qantas Socceroos.

Three years earlier in Kaiserslautern in Germany, Cahill had engineered another come from behind victory with two late goals in Australia's opening World Cup group match to sink the Japanese.

This win on a chilly night at the MCG in front of 69,238 fans ensured Australia finished on top of Group A. The Qantas Socceroos were unbeaten through the eight games of their final phase of qualifying and stayed ahead of Japan at the top of their group.

The Australians, missing several stars including Harry Kewell and Brett Emerton, were on the defensive early. Japan gradually began to control proceedings, with full backs Yuto Nagatomo and Atsuto Uchida charging forward at every opportunity.

The visitors looked more dangerous, and it came as no surprise that they scored first, an in-swinging corner from Kengo Nakamura headed home by Marcus Tulio Tanaka five minutes before the interval.

The Tanaka goal broke a seven game streak of clean sheets in World Cup qualifiers for Socceroo goalkeeper Mark Schwarzer, who had spent the previous 670 minutes in goal without conceding.

The goal appeared to sting the Qantas Socceroos into action as they increased their intensity after half-time. This paid dividends when midfielder Vince Grella chipped a free kick forward for Cahill to rise and head home in trademark fashion in the 59th minute.

Seventeen minutes later, Nick Carle swung over a swirling corner and Cahill took advantage of a disorganised Japanese defence to score the winner at the far post.

It was Cahill's 16th goal in 33 internationals and he was given a huge ovation by the MCG crowd as he walked to the bench in the 86th minute.

The win meant Australia finished five points ahead of Japan in the final round of qualifying, prompting Socceroo coach Pim Verbeek to say his team had sent a "statement to the rest of Asia and probably the rest of the world".

A satisfied Verbeek spoke of the pride he felt for his players after an arduous qualifying campaign.

"At the end of a very long and tough season, they still had the power and courage to fight back from 1-0 down in the first half," he said.

The coach was full of praise for Japan's nemesis, two goal hero Cahill.

"Tommy is a great player," he said. "The first goal was fantastic – what a great goal that was."

MCG, June 17, 2009	
Qantas Socceroos	2 (Cahill 59, 76)
Japan	1 (Tanaka 40)

STANDING TALL
He may have scored twice at the MCG but, on this occasion Tim Cahill was determined to stop Japan from scoring, putting his body on the line to block a free kick.

ACTION REPLAY

REPUBLIC OF IRELAND vs. QANTAS SOCCEROOS

Despite home advantage, the Irish were no match for Australia in Limerick, going down 3-0 with Tim Cahill the hero again. BY HOWARD KOTTON

Another victory, another two goals from Tim Cahill. It was a familiar storyline as the Qantas Socceroos marched to a comprehensive 3-0 international friendly win over the Republic of Ireland in Limerick.

Cahill underlined his class with two superb finishes within six minutes just before half-time to put the visiting side in complete control.

David Carney then sealed an emphatic win for Australia with a stunning effort from 30 yards right on full-time, his shot flying into the top corner as it sailed past substitute keeper Keiren Westwood.

"I'm just glad that Tim was on the pitch for us," coach Pim Verbeek said afterwards.

The Qantas Socceroos had chances to score early, with Mile Jedinak's header forcing a full-stretch save from Irish goalkeeper Shay Given.

Just as Ireland was enjoying a concerted period of pressure, in stepped Cahill. The Everton midfielder and Celtic star Scott McDonald swept forward from halfway, with Cahill putting McDonald in the clear.

The striker then cut back inside and laid off to Cahill, who was free on the edge of the area. The Everton star took one touch on to his left foot, and left Given stranded.

Harry Kewell headed over soon afterwards, but that miss did not matter, with Cahill adding a second in the 44th minute to make it a clinical one-two punch. Ireland's defence allowed Australia too much space once again, with Rhys Williams cantering in to sting Given's palms and, from the rebound, Cahill slamming it home.

The Qantas Socceroos' performance was capped off in the dying seconds with an excellent goal from Carney, who had time and space to hit a superb swerving drive that rocketed into the top corner.

Verbeek started the friendly with an experimental side. The backline was inexperienced as a combination, with regular captain Lucas Neill not selected.

But this did not matter as Australia dominated for large parts of the contest. The visitors looked comfortable on the ball and moved it forward quickly and efficiently.

Australia started brightly and Luke Wilkshire had the first chance, but his shot from the edge of the box went wide, while Kewell forced a low save from Given soon afterwards from a free kick.

Robbie Keane had the first chance for Ireland, his glancing header going over the bar in the 13th minute.

Australian goalkeeper Mark Schwarzer was called into action for the first time on 23 minutes, saving a shot from Keane after he did brilliantly to create space for himself in the penalty box.

In the second half, Ireland substitute Stephen Hunt had the chance to claw a goal back, yet his shot went across the face of goal.

Thomond Park, Limerick, August 12, 2009	
Republic of Ireland	0
Qantas Socceroos	3 (Cahill 38, 44, Carney 90)

GOING NOWHERE Australia's Rhys Williams makes a textbook sliding tackle on Irish winger Aiden McGeady

ACTION REPLAY

KOREA REPUBLIC vs. QANTAS SOCCEROOS

The Qantas Socceroos suffered their first loss since March to a classy Korean outfit. BY HOWARD KOTTON

A depleted Australian line-up battled gamely in hostile territory before succumbing to the Korea Republic 3-1 in an international friendly in Seoul.

The Qantas Socceroos were without skipper Lucas Neill, Tim Cahill and Harry Kewell, and struggled to contain the lively and talented Koreans.

The Koreans quickly shot out to a 2-0 lead, Park Chu-Young scoring after just five minutes and Lee Jung Soo doubling the advantage with a goal in the 20th minute.

Patrick Kisnorbo brought the visiting side back into contention in the 34th minute when he headed home a Mark Bresciano free kick.

However, after dominating the second half, the Koreans ensured victory in the 87th minute when Seol Ki-Hyun headed home a Park Ji Sung cross.

The result meant the Korea Republic extended its unbeaten run to a staggering 26 games.

The home side controlled the first half hour as Australia struggled to get into the game on a poor Seoul pitch.

Korea's first goal came as a result of an error by Shane Stefanutto, attempting to prevent Jason Culina's pass from going for a throw-in.

The defender gave the ball away to Lee Chung Yong, who in turn played Park Chu-Young in behind the defence.

He gave goalkeeper Mark Schwarzer no chance from six metres out.

Scott McDonald created Australia's first scoring opportunity after 14 minutes when the Celtic striker shot narrowly wide from the corner of the box. At the other end, Schwarzer was almost left embarrassed by a Park Chu-Young shot, which he just prevented from going over the goal line.

No such luck two minutes later, however, when Lee Jung-Soo beat Schwarzer, finishing off a well rehearsed move with his head.

Schwarzer then denied the Koreans a third goal, saving from Ki Sung-Yueng, before Leeds defender Kisnorbo headed home to put Australia back into contention. The Qantas Socceroos then had the chance of an equaliser through Culina in first-half injury time, but his shot went wide.

The visitors continued to press for an equaliser in the second half, with Stefanutto's screaming left-foot volley tipped over the bar by Lee Woon-Jae. Five minutes later, the keeper was called into action again from a Bresciano free kick.

In the dying minutes, as Australia continued to press forward for an equaliser, the Koreans put the result beyond doubt with a devastating counter-attacking move.

Park Ji-Sung broke clear down the left wing before setting up Seol Ki-Hyun with a pinpoint cross. The substitute's downward header just beat Schwarzer, inflicting Australia's first defeat since the loss to Kuwait in March.

Seoul World Cup Stadium, September 5, 2009	
Korea Republic	3 (Park 5, Lee 20, Seol 87)
Qantas Socceroos	1 (Kisnorbo 34)

HEADS UP
Australia's Josh Kennedy (left) and Patrick Kisnorbo (centre) challenge for the ball against three Korea Republic opponents. Kisnorbo scored Australia's only goal of the game.

Aussies Abroad

All the latest news on Australians overseas. BY OLIVER NEWBERY

England

After the highs of 2008-09, it's been an indifferent start for **Mark Schwarzer** in his second season at Fulham Australia's No. 1 shot-stopper kept just one clean sheet for the Cottagers in the first six games of the Premier League, and that came against hapless Portsmouth. Fellow Socceroo keeper **Brad Jones**, normally a first-team regular with Championship side Middlesborough, was sidelined with injury. Faring better, however, is Jones' Boro teammate **Rhys Williams**. Although the young rising star and his team received a reality check as they went down 5-0 at home to West Brom, Williams has played a key role, scoring in the 2-2 draw with Coventry

While Williams has been used as a defender in coach **Pim Verbeek's** international set-up, Boro manager Gareth Southgate has been playing him in central midfield will great success.

Across the Pennines at Everton, the Toffees' season took a turn for the better after they routed Blackburn 3-0. Socceroo talisman **Tim Cahill** made a steady start to the new term, scoring against international teammate Schwarzer in Everton's 2-1 defeat of Fulham, as well as a double against the Republic of Ireland in August's international friendly. Cahill was joined at Goodison in September by international colleague and best friend **Lucas Neill** The Australian skipper, who returned from the football wilderness following his departure from West Ham, increases Everton's defensive options, which had been weakened by transfer sales and injuries to key defenders.

Fellow battler and mid-table 'gravy boat' Blackburn also made a shaky start: Rovers were 15th on the ladder with seven points from their first six matches. Having struggled with injuries last term following his transfer from Torino, **Vince Grella** has made a strong return this season, although he was sent off against Aston Villa last month. The Socceroo midfielder has been tipped as a star player by manager **Sam Allardyce**. Also returning from a long spell on the sidelines at Rovers after a serious knee injury is **Brett Emerton**, who enjoyed his first taste of senior action in eight months. Grella and Emerton, who both played key roles in Germany in 2006, will be looking to stay injury-free this year to secure their places in the squad for South Africa.

SAFE HANDS Mark Schwarzer's Fulham has enjoyed a mixed start to the season.

Italy

In Serie A, **Mark Bresciano** has been a regular in Palermo's first team in the early stages of the season, although he was an unused sub in the 1-0 loss to his former club Parma Palermo got off the mark with a win against Napoli on the opening weekend. Meanwhile, in Serie B, **Carl Valeri** played a full game as Grosetto picked up its first win of the season, defeating Modena 3-1

GOING JAPANESE Josh Kennedy is on fire at Nagoya Grampus.

Japan

Big man **Josh Kennedy** signed for Japan's Nagoya Grampus in the off-season, travelling east from German club Karlsruhe following its relegation from the Bundesliga. The 27-year-old had demanded a move in order to get more first-team opportunities before the World Cup. Having helped the Qantas Socceroos qualify for South Africa, Kennedy has all but secured his place in the squad next June, bagging four goals in his first eight games for his new club.

Russia

Unlike most of Europe, the Russian Premier League is nearing its final stages, with **Luke Wilkshire's** Dinamo Moscow sitting mid-table Wilkshire has been getting plenty of valuable game time most recently in the Moscow derby when Dinamo went down 3-0 to rival CSKA Wilkshire was sent off in the loss at home to Rubin Kazan, and things got even worse the following week when Dinamo crashed out of the Europa League against Bulgarian outfit CSKA Sofia

SEEING RED Luke Wilkshire was sent off for Dinamo Moscow

Scotland

Scott McDonald's Celtic opened a four-point gap over arch-rival Rangers at the top of the Scottish Premier League after the first six games, winning five and drawing the other The Hoops' Europa League adventure got off to a poor start, though, as they went down 2-1 to Hapoel Tel Aviv in Israel. McDonald has continued his prolific form for his club, netting seven times already this season. He will hope his domestic scoring form translates to the international stage soon as he looks to end his goal drought at the top level.

Switzerland

Veteran defender **Scott Chipperfield** found the net twice in a strong start for FC Basel, with a Europa League win against fancied Italian outfit Roma the highlight Chipperfield came on as a substitute in Basle's 1-0 loss to Fulham in October, lining up against fellow Socceroo **Mark Schwarzer.** The teams will meet again in December

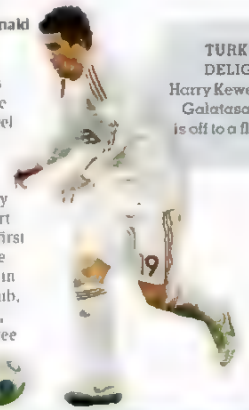
The Netherlands

Former Sheffield United player **David Carney** made his debut for Dutch club FC Twente with a late appearance as a substitute in his team's 2-0 win over Heerenveen. **Pim Verbeek** is said to have been instrumental in the transfer, convincing Twente's English boss **Steve McClaren** that Carney was the solution for the team's left-sided problems. Carney helped put himself on the international radar by scoring a sensational late goal for the Qantas Socceroos in the 3-0 defeat of the Republic of Ireland in Limerick.

Defending Dutch champion AZ Alkmaar began its Eredivisie title defence in style with four consecutive victories **Brett Holman** scored twice for **Ronald Koeman's** men early in the season and, with AZ taking part in the UEFA Champions League, he will gain valuable experience at the highest level in club football

Turkey

Harry Kewell's Galatasaray made an extraordinary start to the season, winning its first 10 games in Europe and the Turkish Super Lig. Kewell, in his second season at the club, enjoyed a rich vein of form, scoring four goals from three games in August



TURKISH DELIGHT Harry Kewell's Galatasaray is off to a flyer

Men on the Move

Who went where in the past few months?

Player	From	To
Lucas Neill	West Ham (England)	Everton (England)
David Carney	Sheffield United (England)	FC Twente (Netherlands)
Michael Beauchamp	AaB Aalborg (Denmark)	Al Jazira (UAE)
Jason Culina	PSV Eindhoven (Netherlands)	Gold Coast United
Josh Kennedy	Karlsruhe (Germany)	Nagoya Grampus (Japan)
Patrick Kisnorbo	Leicester (England)	Leeds (England)
Shane Stefanutto	Lyn Oslo (Norway)	North Queensland Fury
Mile Sterjovski	Derby (England)	Perth Glory
Danny Allsopp	Melbourne Victory	Al-Rayyan (Qatar)
Adrian Leijer	Fulham (England)	Melbourne Victory
Jacob Burns	Unirea Urziceni (Romania)	Perth Glory
Mile Jedinak	Genclerbirligi (Turkey)	Antalyaspor (Turkey)
Adam Griffiths	Gold Coast United	Al Shabab (Saudi Arabia)

Results and Fixtures

Qantas Socceroos' results and confirmed fixtures from January 1, 2009, to July 31, 2010. The draw for the 2010 FIFA World Cup group stages will be held on December 4, 2009.

AFC Asian Cup Qualifiers

INDONESIA 0
AUSTRALIA 0
Gelora Bung Karno Stadium, Jakarta
January 28, 2009

AUSTRALIA 0
KUWAIT 1
Canberra Stadium, Canberra
March 5, 2009

AUSTRALIA v OMAN
Etihad Stadium, Melbourne
October 14, 2009

OMAN v AUSTRALIA
Muscat
November 14, 2009

KUWAIT v AUSTRALIA
Kuwait City
January 6, 2010

AUSTRALIA v INDONESIA
Suncorp Stadium, Brisbane
March 3, 2010

FIFA World Cup Qualifiers

JAPAN 0
AUSTRALIA 0
Yokohama International Stadium, Yokohama
February 11, 2009

AUSTRALIA 2
UZBEKISTAN 0
ANZ Stadium, Sydney
April 1, 2009

QATAR 0
AUSTRALIA 0
Doha
June 6, 2009

AUSTRALIA 2
BAHRAIN 0
ANZ Stadium, Sydney
June 10, 2009

AUSTRALIA 2
JAPAN 1
MCG, Melbourne
June 17, 2009

International Friendlies

REPUBLIC OF IRELAND 0
AUSTRALIA 3
Limerick
August 12, 2009

KOREA REPUBLIC 3
AUSTRALIA 1
Seoul
September 5, 2009

AUSTRALIA v NETHERLANDS
Sydney Football Stadium
October 10, 2009

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On the spot

Test your knowledge and skills

Reckon you know a thing or two about the Qantas Socceroos? Take this quiz and all will be revealed.

1 Which country was Australia's opponent in Pim Verbeek's first game as coach?
A. Singapore
B. Qatar
C. China

2 Which two players made their debut for Australia against Japan in June?
A. Rhys Williams and Dario Vidosic
B. Rhys Williams and Shane Stefanutto
C. Matthew Spiranovic and Shane Stefanutto

3 How many different English clubs has Lucas Neill played for?
A. 3
B. 4
C. 5

4 Which of these players was the first to make his debut for Australia?
A. John Aloisi
B. Brett Emerton
C. Harry Kewell

5 Who scored Australia's first goal against Uzbekistan in April?
A. Josh Kennedy
B. Harry Kewell
C. Mark Bresciano

GOAL MACHINE
How many goals has Tim Cahill netted?

6 Which of these Socceroos is playing in the UEFA Champions League in the 2009-10 season?
A. David Carney
B. Luke Wilkshire
C. Brett Holman

7 Who missed a penalty when Australia played the Netherlands in 2006?
A. Craig Moore
B. Tim Cahill
C. Mark Viduka

8 And which of those three scored against the Netherlands that day?
A. Craig Moore
B. Tim Cahill
C. Mark Viduka

9 Which country knocked Australia out of the 2007 Asian Cup finals?
A. Japan
B. Iraq
C. Oman

10 Where will the 2014 World Cup be played?
A. Brazil
B. Argentina
C. Mexico

11 Which Socceroo is the captain of Perth Glory?
A. Jacob Burns
B. Mile Sterjovski
C. Jason Culina

12 How many goals did Australia concede in its final World Cup qualifying group?
A. 0
B. 1
C. 2

13 How many goals has Tim Cahill scored for Australia?
A. 11
B. 13
C. 18

14 Which Socceroo was born in Washington DC?
A. Nick Carle
B. Bruce Djite
C. Archie Thompson

15 How many caps has Mark Viduka won for the Qantas Socceroos?
A. 33
B. 43
C. 53

16 Which of these goalkeepers does not play in the English Championship?
A. Adam Federici
B. Brad Jones
C. Michael Petkovic

17 Which of these players represented the Republic of Ireland at under-21 level?
A. David Carney
B. Mark Milligan
C. Shane Lowry

18 Who was Australia's top goalscorer in the 2007 Asian Cup?
A. Mark Viduka
B. John Aloisi
C. Tim Cahill

19 Who scored Australia's second goal against Croatia in the 2006 World Cup?
A. Harry Kewell
B. Craig Moore
C. Mark Bresciano

20 Who was Australia's captain against Indonesia in January?
A. Lucas Neill
B. Jason Culina
C. Craig Moore

NEW BLUE
Lucas Neill was on the move again in September when he joined Everton.

Answers: 1.A 2.B 3.C 4.A 5.A 6.C 7.A 8.B 9.A 10.A 11.B 12.C 13.A 15.B 16.C 17.A 18.A 19.C 20.C

BY THE STATS

Qantas Socceroos statistics in 2009.

1 country (Japan) that qualified for the 2010 World Cup before the Qantas Socceroos

1 point for Australia in its first two Asian Cup qualifying games

2 debutants (Dario Vidosic and Rhys Williams) for Australia v Japan at the MCG

3 World Cups for which Australia has qualified

4 goals scored by Tim Cahill in internationals against Japan

8 nations/co-nations bidding for the 2018 World Cup

11 June, the first day of the 2010 World Cup

11 A-League players who started for Australia v Kuwait

12 Australians contracted to English Premier League clubs

14 years since Craig Moore made his debut for Australia against Ghana

14th in the world, Australia's highest FIFA world ranking, in September 2009

20 points for the Qantas Socceroos in their final Asian World Cup qualifying group

26 games unbeaten for the Korea Republic after beating Australia 3-1

29 clean sheets kept by Mark Schwarzer for Australia, a national record

55 per cent winning percentage for Pim Verbeek as Australia's coach

194 centimetres, the height of Australia's giant striker Josh Kennedy

670 minutes before Mark Schwarzer conceded a goal in the final Asian World Cup qualifying group

11,832 kilometres between Sydney and Tashkent, Uzbekistan, where Australia played its first game of the final World Cup qualifying group

69,238 spectators at the MCG for Australia v Japan

BRICK WALL Mark Schwarzer didn't concede a goal for nine games in a row.

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FINAL WHISTLE

FOR CLUB AND COUNTRY

Playing regular first-team football is crucial when a World Cup is on the horizon.

BY JOHN MURRAY

TRADING PLACES
David Carney has swapped Sheffield United for FC Twente as the World Cup looms.

Josh Kennedy did it in June, David Carney bit the bullet in August, while Michael Beauchamp followed suit just a couple of weeks ago.

The common thread? Moving to a new club.

Nothing abnormal about that admittedly – these days, players seem to change teams more frequently than Elizabeth Taylor swapped husbands – but when a World Cup is just around the corner, transfer activity seems even more frenzied than usual.

In recent months, Australian players have headed to new pastures all over the globe. Mile Jedinak switched one Turkish club, Genclerbirligi, for another, Antalyaspor. Lucas Neill left West Ham for fellow Premier League club Everton. Patrick Kisnorbo decided to travel two hours further north in England, from Leicester City to Leeds United.

Meanwhile, Jason Culina, Chris Coyne, Jacob Burns, Shane Stefanutto and Mile Sterjovski are just five Australian internationals who left Europe to return home to the A-League for the 2009-10 season.

For many, the pull of playing in the World Cup is a major reason behind the change of scene. Australia coach Pim Verbeek will be desperate for each member of his squad to be playing regular first-team football in the lead-up to the tournament. Languishing in the reserves while a rival gets a game once or even twice a week could cost you a seat on the plane to South Africa.

Of course, the likes of star duo Neill and Culina don't have much to worry about. But for Carney, getting more first-team opportunities, at the top level, was a major factor in his transfer from English Championship side Sheffield United to Dutch Eredivisie heavyweight FC Twente.

"FC Twente are in Europe and finished second in the league last year," he said.

"It's a good club and an ambitious club, and I think it was just the right move for me really. I think it's the ideal club for me to lead into the 2010 World Cup.

"To get picked would be fantastic. It would be a dream."

The key with the Socceroos is the way they play is the Dutch way.

When Carney speaks, you can still hear traces of the Liverpudlian accent he developed from several years playing in Everton's youth teams alongside a teenage Wayne Rooney.

His has been a journey so familiar to many of his countrymen. After signing with Everton at 16, and later playing in the 2002 FA Youth Cup final, Carney had brief spells at several other British clubs. But his dreams of stardom on the European stage didn't come true, and he returned to Australia, and Sydney FC.

Back home, he made an immediate impression, scoring six goals as his new club took out the A-League title in 2006. He made his international debut the same year.

Once again, the European clubs came knocking in 2007, and this time, Carney was ready to take the next step.

He flourished in his first season at Sheffield United, but his opportunities became limited when the Blades appointed a new manager in 2008. He was loaned out to Norwich in 2009 and, at the end of that season, knew it was time to move on.

"It was definitely a culture shock coming over to the Netherlands but, football-wise, it's fantastic. It's all about the passing game and it's really technical," Carney revealed. "The two leagues are like chalk and cheese."

Carney's international breakthrough came at the 2007 Asian Cup finals where he caught the eye playing at left wing-back. In August, he scored a breathtaking goal from long range in the 3-0 win against the Republic of Ireland.

His versatility – he can play at full-back or on the wing – could be the trump card with limited places up for grabs in the squad for South Africa.

"The key with the Socceroos is the way they play is the Dutch way. The full-backs attack as well," he said.

"I don't mind where I play, as long as I can attack. But either way, I'm just happy to play and to be out there."

Carney is enjoying his new life in the Netherlands. Coached by former England boss Steve McLaren, FC Twente made a strong start in its bid for the Eredivisie title, and was unbeaten in its first eight games .

"It's all going well, but we've all just got to keep working hard and, hopefully by the end of the season, we'll have achieved something good," Carney said.

Come season's end, he may well have booked his ticket to South Africa too.

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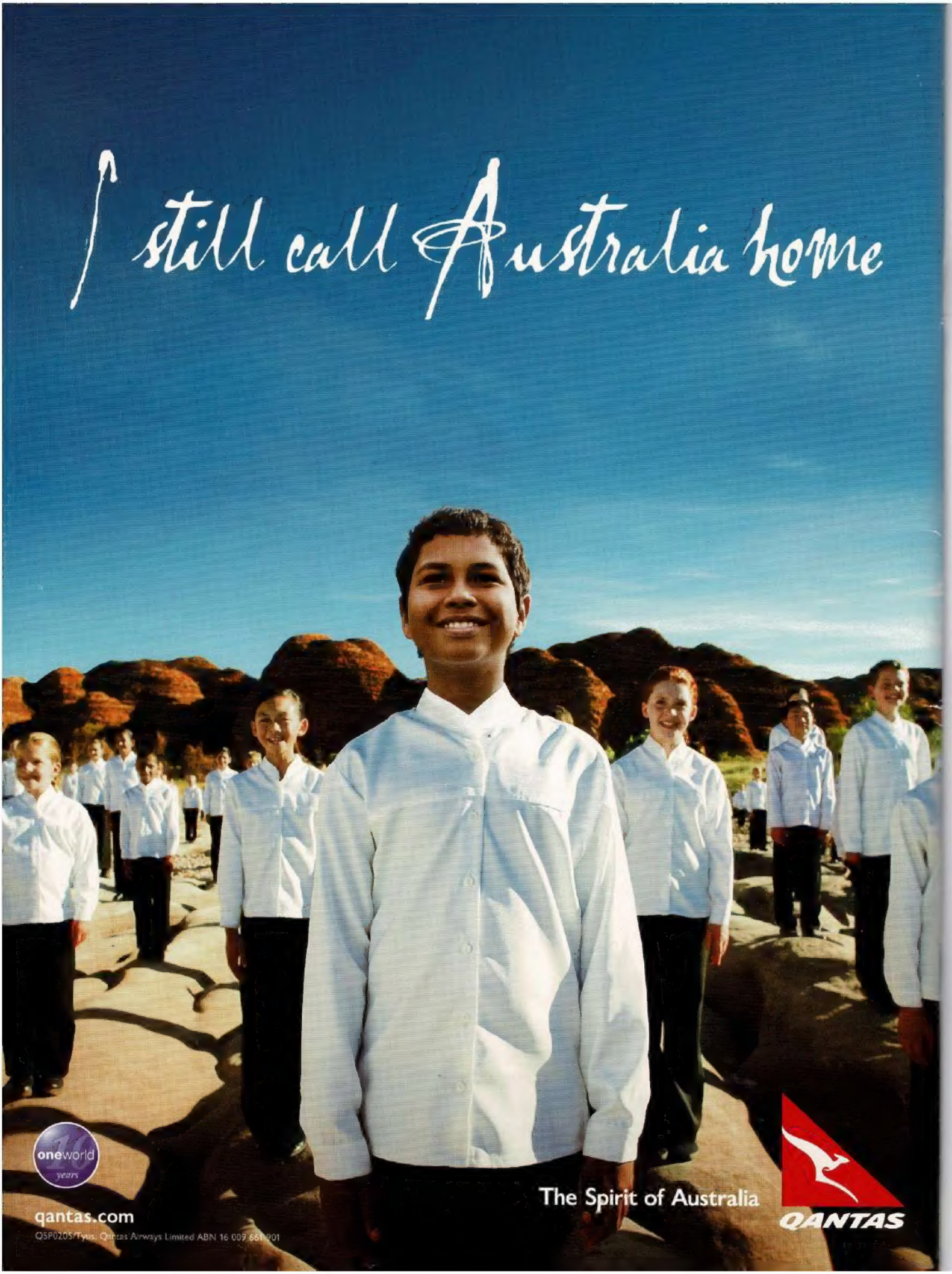
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